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MAGAZINE



THE INDEPENDENT

Saturday 21 February 1998 70p No 3,540

Thousands to sue over slimming pills

By Jeremy Laurence Health Editor

Tens of thousands of overweight Americans are preparing to sue the manufacturers of two of the most popular slimming pills. What lawyers are predicting could be the biggest compensation case since asbestos.

The worldwide withdrawal of the drugs fenfluramine and dexfenfluramine last summer after they were linked with heart problems has triggered a feeding frenzy among legal firms who have been luring clients with the prospect of multi-million dollar suits.

More than 60,000 prescriptions for fenfluramine or dexfenfluramine were is-

sued in 1996 in the UK but there have been no reports of patients suffering the heart problem side-effects and no arrangements have been made by the Department of Health for tracing patients who may have taken the drugs. As yet, there are no reports of imminent British legal actions.

A spokeswoman for Alexander Harris, the Manchester solicitors who specialise in medical litigation, said: "We have had a couple of inquiries but interest is only just beginning. It usually follows what happens in the US."

An estimated four to six million patients in the US have taken the pills and studies have suggested more than a million could

be affected. Cases have been filed in every US state and a steering group of lawyers are meeting early next month to co-ordinate them in a mass action to be heard before a judge in Philadelphia.

Larry Burman, a Philadelphia lawyer and member of the steering group, said: "There are hundreds of cases filed in the federal courts and hundreds and hundreds in the state court system. Each could be one person or 20. A lot of people are saying this could be one of the biggest mass tort cases [class actions] ever to hit the court system."

Paul Rheingold, a New York lawyer said: "We have 3,000 cases we are looking into and we are filing five or six a day. We don't

know how many will translate into law suits but we have 100 so far. I would guess the total for the US will involve 100,000 individuals, one of the biggest actions ever."

Diet pills became a craze in America four years ago. The most popular prescription was for "fen-phen", the appetite suppressant fenfluramine which was combined with the stimulant drug phentermine to increase its effectiveness. The US Food and Drug Administration asked the manufacturers of fenfluramine to withdraw the product after studies showed 30 per cent of patients taking the combination had abnormal echocardiograms, indicating heart defects. The fen-phen combination never

caught on in the UK prior to the withdrawal of fenfluramine.

Some patients have been found to have damaged heart valves and pulmonary hypertension - increased resistance to the flow of blood in the lungs. The *New England Journal of Medicine* reported last August the case of a 29-year-old woman who died after taking the combination for only 23 days. She was five-foot five-inches tall and weighed 13-and-a-half stone.

Mr Rheingold said: "If you are talking pulmonary hypertension or valve replacement, those are million dollar cases. Others could have a claim for psychological damage. But many may have been unaware

anything was wrong until they had an echocardiogram."

Fenfluramine, which is thought to be the cause of the problems, was introduced in the Sixties and has been taken by millions of people. Dexfenfluramine, which is half the molecule of fenfluramine, has also been withdrawn. It was developed to retain the appetite suppressant properties but with fewer side effects of dry mouth, dizziness and digestive problems. Phentermine remains on the market.

Experts are puzzled why it has taken so long for the danger to emerge. One possibility is that it may only apply to the combination treatment.

Sinn Fein ban fails to please either side

David McKittrick
Lead Correspondent

SINN FEIN was hauled yesterday from the Irish multi-party talks for the next two weeks. The long-awaited move drew protests from both Unionists and republicans - Unionists because they wanted permanent exclusion, and republicans because they wanted no expulsion at all.

The British and Irish governments, in excluding Sinn Fein until 9 March, seemed at the same time concerned to act as leniently as possible. It has been clear for some time that Sinn Fein would be penalised following two recent IRA killings, but London and Dublin have given the impression that the measure would be taken with reluctance.

Both governments had concluded that Sinn Fein had to go, but both want to have them back in to participate in negotiations as the talks approach their May deadline. The Irish foreign minister, David Andrews, paid tribute to Sinn Fein's "valuable contribution" to the talks.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, said contact with Sinn Fein would be maintained during its absence. She added: "There is little time left now until May. Both governments are determined to work with the parties in the coming six weeks. We want as many parties as possible, including Sinn Fein, to have their opportunity to contribute."

The decision was condemned by Sinn Fein's president, Gerry Adams, who said he was seeking urgent meetings with Tony Blair and the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. Sinn Fein has abandoned its attempt in the Dublin High Court to obtain a legal re-

straint on the governments.

Describing the current situation as a crisis and "a huge setback" for the peace process, Mr Adams declared: "The decision is disgraceful. The process by which it was reached lacks any notion of natural justice. Sinn Fein is out, but Sinn Fein is not down."

He said there was palpable anger in nationalist areas, and added: "I appeal to everyone to channel their anger and frustration at today's decision into calm and disciplined protest."

There have already been signs of an increased security force presence around some nationalist areas in anticipation of possible protests and street disturbances.

By contrast, the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, said the decision marked a new low in the process. He added: "The credibility of the Government is being squandered and if it has any honour left it must feel very soiled today."

Just as Sinn Fein are being sent off the field, the Ulster Democratic party is to be allowed back on from next Monday, following a period of suspension imposed after three killings by its paramilitary associates, the Ulster Defence Association.

The UDP negotiator David Adams said: "We would be seriously concerned at the fact that the governments have seen fit not only to specify a date for Sinn Fein, which they failed to do for us, but also that that date means that in fact Sinn Fein's time out of the process is far less than ours."

"This would seem to indicate that the two governments seem to value some lives more than others, and is a clear indication of double standards for republicans and loyalists."



Dressing up in Venice: Carnival time fills Venice with glorious costumes; this year's theme is Casanova, who died 280 years ago Looking for the party, page 15 Photograph: Brian Harris

'My sacred duty': Annan flies into Baghdad in final bid to head off war

By Andrew Marshall

KOFI ANNAN flew into Baghdad yesterday in a last-ditch effort to head off a war with Iraq. The UN Secretary-General said he had a "sacred duty" to try to defuse Iraq's stand-off with the United Nations.

His task is far from simple: he must persuade Iraq to give UN weapons inspectors enough freedom to satisfy the US and the UN, something the UN has failed to do so far. The US and Britain will be on their guard for any effort to prolong the diplomatic proceedings merely in order to head off air strikes.

Mr Annan was met at Baghdad's Saddam International Airport by Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and Foreign

Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf. "I hope I will leave Baghdad with a package that will be acceptable to all... I'm reasonably optimistic that we will find a peaceful solution," Annan told reporters. Aziz added: "Iraq wants a balanced and fair solution... that preserves the sovereignty, dignity and national security of Iraq as well as the implementation of U.N. resolutions."

Mr Annan will begin talks with Mr Aziz this morning; an appointment with Saddam Hussein will be arranged if this goes well. Mr Annan has said he expects to spend no more than two days in Baghdad before returning to New York.

President Bill Clinton put the onus for an end to the dispute firmly on Saddam yesterday in a televised message to Arab nations. He said Washington had "no quarrel with the Iraqi people, who are heirs to a proud civilisation and who have suffered for so many years under Saddam's rule."

He added: "If force proves necessary to resolve this crisis, we will do everything we can to prevent innocent people from getting hurt. But make no mistake about it, Saddam must bear full responsibility for every casualty that results."

As Mr Annan flew in, the United Nations approved a new plan that would allow Iraq to double the amount of oil it can sell on world markets to buy food and medicine. The Security Council agreed to increase from \$2.1bn to \$5.2bn the amount of oil Iraq can sell every

six months, though Iraq says it cannot produce this amount. The timing of the vote was clearly meant as a boost to the Secretary-General's prospects when he meets Saddam Hussein. "This is an excellent outcome today," Sir John Weston, Britain's UN representative said. "It's a very good decision to be announcing at [this] point."

But the background to the visit is not encouraging. The US and Britain have assembled a massive fleet in the Gulf, and anger at their presence is growing. Protests erupted yesterday in Amman in Jordan, where at least one protester was killed and Turkish police clashed with hundreds of Islamists demonstrating after Friday prayers in central Istanbul.

The hearing was adjourned until Monday. Further reports, Sport



Kieran Fallon told court that TV man was lying

By Ian Surrell

Champion jockey Kieran Fallon was accused yesterday in the High Court of admitting throwing a race. It was alleged that Mr Fallon had told a television racing presenter that he had "pulled" the horse on instructions from his trainer. The claim was made during Mr Fallon's libel case against the *Sporting Life* racing paper.

Channel 4's Derek Thompson said, under subpoena by the *Sporting Life*, that Mr Fallon had confessed to not riding Top

Cees to win in the Swaffham handicap, when the two had discussed the race at The Old Plough pub near Newmarket.

He told Mr Justice Morland and the jury: "I don't want to repeat this, which is why I've tried to stop it coming to open court because it was said to me in confidence. I was asking: 'What happened with Top Cees this afternoon as I thought he would win' and Kieran's words were 'Yes, I thought the horse would win as well but when I got into the paddock Jack told me to stop it'."

But Mr Fallon was recalled to the witness box yesterday to denounce the claim as "a lie".

"Something like that to be said... it would be terrible for any jockey to even think about something like that, to talk about stopping the horse, let alone doing it, would be to jeopardise your career. Mr Thompson is inventing it - he's a liar." He said neither the horse's trainer, Lynda Ramsden, nor her husband, Jack, had ever asked him to stop a horse.

Cross-examined by Richard Hartley QC, for the *Sporting*

Life, Mr Fallon denied that his orders that day had been not to win. Mr Hartley said: "But if the governor tells you not to win, I suggest that you, as the jockey on that occasion, would follow orders." Mr Fallon countered: "You think I would risk my licence in order to stop a horse?"

The Ramsdens and Mr Fallon are suing over a "savage verbal onslaught", in an unsigned editorial in May 1995, the day after Top Cees won the Chester Cup. It said they conspired to deceive the public by deliberately not trying to win the

Swaffham. Publishers MGN Ltd, part owners of *The Independent*, deny libel. They say the article is justified and fair comment on a "scandal" that was a matter of public interest.

The hearing was adjourned until Monday.

Further reports, Sport



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Men in sex parties case escape jail sentences

By Kathy Marks

SEVEN men who became the focus of an international campaign after they were prosecuted for taking part in private sex parties escaped prison sentences yesterday at Bolton Crown Court.

Judge Michael Lever, QC, had warned that he might jail at least some of the so-called

Bolton Seven, who were found guilty of buggery and gross indecency at a trial last month.

But after more than three hours of defence submissions in mitigation, the judge handed out suspended sentences to two of the men, and probation and community service orders to the rest.

The defendants, who had received letters of support from two bishops and from human rights groups around the world,

were prosecuted after police seized video tapes on which they had recorded the parties for their own amusement.

Under the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, sex between men is illegal if more than two people are present. The men faced prison sentences of up to five years, and Amnesty International planned to adopt them as prisoners of conscience if they were jailed.

Gay campaigners have con-

demned the law as discriminatory, in that it penalises private sexual behaviour between consenting adults. All the Bolton men were over the age of consent, except one who was just under 18, and all were willing participants.

Outside court yesterday, the men issued a statement in which they condemned the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service to pursue the case.

"Regardless of the sentence, the trial has had a ruinous effect on our lives," they said, adding that the "cruel resuscitation" of an obscure section of the Act showed "callous insensitivity."

"One of the positive consequences of this bitter experience is that a new sense of outrage and urgency has been injected into the law reform movement, and the demand for a comprehensive review of our sex laws

may well now become irresistible," the men said.

Before passing sentence, the judge referred to numerous letters that he had received asking him to show clemency. He said he accepted that Terry Connell, 55, the oldest defendant, was "a perfectly respectable and decent man" who had "led an exemplary life."

Ben Emmerson, a defence barrister, argued in mitigation

that the prosecutions were a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and that, although the Convention had not yet been incorporated into English law, the judge was obliged to take account of it.

Mr Emmerson also said publicity about the trial had led to several of the men being assaulted and to firebomb attacks on their homes.

Sources close to the case say

that police originally raided the house of one defendant, Norman Williams, in the mistaken belief that he was part of a paedophile ring.

It has emerged that Barbara Mills, the Director of Public Prosecutions, endorsed the decision to prosecute the men. In a letter to Brian Iddon, MP for Bolton South-East, Dame Barbara said the prosecution was in the public interest.

Goodbye to the Metro, the car we never quite fell in love with

By Ross Prince

It was supposed to be the Mini for the 1980s, a nippy little run around that would rescue the British motoring industry from the onslaught of the Japanese.

Eighteen years on, the last Metro trundled off the production line yesterday, outclassed and outsold by snappier models with snappier names: Polo, Clio and Micra.

At its death the Metro wasn't even British any more, having come under the ownership of the Bavarian uber-firm BMW when Rover was sold to the Germans. It will be replaced by a new Mini, to be built jointly by Rover and BMW.

The Metro started life as in October 1980 as the Austin Mini Metro. It was initially the saviour of British Leyland, which before the car's introduction hadn't manufactured a big seller for years. But had a chequered career, suffering from a lack of funding. After each attempt at revamp and relaunch it would rocket to occupy top spot in its class, the most super of the super minis, but plummet swiftly as it failed to keep up with the competition.

The high point of the Metro's journey came early on when its picture went around the world, carrying the then Lady Diana Spencer away from the cameras during her engagement to Prince Charles.

Falling sales and sneers from other drivers dented the little car's image, but by far its lowest moment was unconnected to manufacturing problems.

The Metro attracted infamy and humiliation for its owners when, in 1994, it was revealed as the sexual partner



End of an era: The final Metro is signed off by all the workers who helped make it in the company's Longbridge factory

of choice for a disturbed 20-year-old man, who was treated for his fetish at the Institute of Psychiatry in London. The Metro's biggest fan said he found it particularly arousing when the car's exhaust pipe belched fumes.

Despite this, the car enjoyed periods of more conventional popularity, its sales pushing past the two million mark.

It was even voted Best Small Car

in the World by Autocar and Motor after its 1990 relaunch. The trouble was that even the redesigned car began to look outdated as it failed to keep up with its competitors.

Often derided for its cramped interior, and, some said, unattractive look, the original Metro had an engine dating back to the Morris Minor technology of the 1950s. Despite being branded "the car to beat the world,"

drivers complained it whined at speeds over 45 miles per hour.

Still, that didn't stop its manufacturers from trying to add some sales with a little badge engineering - the hatchback was renamed the Rover Metro in 1990 and eventually became the Rover 100 in 1994.

The last Rover 100, in a striking silver finish, was waved off from Rover's Longbridge plant in Birmingham last

week. It was signed by all of the 1,200 people who worked on it and handed over to the Heritage Centre Motor Museum in Gaydon, Warwickshire.

Although production has stopped, a last batch of cars, no doubt future classics, are still available. They come in three and five door models, 1.1 or 1.4 litre K series engines and five different trim levels. Prices range from £6,500 to £10,000. A bargain.

MONDAY

IN THE INDEPENDENT

DEBORAH ROSS

meets Mickey, Goofy and big fan at Eurodisney

THE EYE

Mardi Gras: why don't we have any fun?

Heard the one about the Japanese comic? Actually, he's quite funny

MEDIA PLUS

How a television series survives when the star quits

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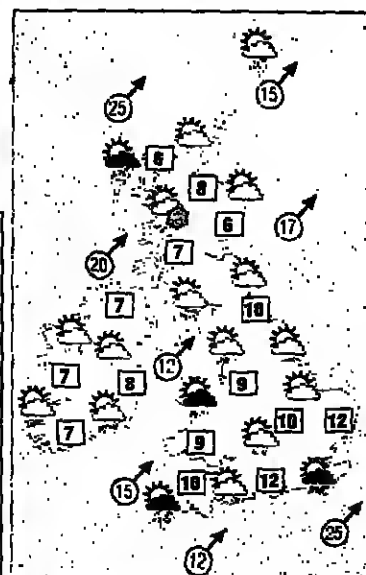
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Arts	19	Sport	Time Off, 16-26
Leader & letters	20	Crosswords	Time Off, 14, 26
Comment	21	TV & radio	The Eye



Recycled paper made up 41.4% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1997.

WEATHER

The British Isles, noon today



General summary and outlook:

Overnight rain will soon clear eastern parts, then it will be a fresher day than of late everywhere with a mix of sunshine and showers. Only a few locations in eastern Scotland and north-east England are likely to escape dry, and it is here that the best of the days sunshine can be expected. The showers will be frequent in the west throughout the day, with sleet in the north and snow on the peaks. Some of the afternoon showers will be rather sharp and slow to clear.

Sunday will be mainly dry with sunny breaks although a few showers will occur in the west. It will turn milder by Monday with rain and strong winds in the north, but elsewhere will be mainly dry. The mild spell of weather will continue through Tuesday and Wednesday, with some further rain in the far north and a little drizzle possible in the west. However, the east and south will be mainly dry with sunny breaks.

most recent available figures at noon local time. C: cloudy; V: fog; H: heavy; M: mist; S: rain; SN: snow; S: sunny; B: thunder

Aberdeen	10 50	Cardiff	11 52	Inverness	14 57	Oxford	11 52
Aberystwyth	12 54	Carlisle	12 54	Isle of Man	12 54	Plymouth	11 52
Ayr	11 52	Exeter	11 52	Leeds	12 54	Scarborough	9 48
Belfast	11 52	Gloucester	11 52	London	12 54	Shrewsbury	11 52
Birmingham	12 54	Hull	12 54	Liverpool	12 54	Southampton	12 54
Blackpool	11 52	Edinburgh	12 54	Leeds	12 54	Southend	11 52
Bournemouth	10 50	Exeter	11 52	Manchester	12 54	St Andrews	11 52
Brighton	10 50	Glasgow	11 52	Newcastle	12 54	Stirling	10 50
Bristol	12 54	Glasgow	11 52	Nottingham	11 52	York	11 52

Lighting-up times

Today		Tomorrow	
Belfast	17.43 to 7.30	Belfast	17.45 to 7.28
Birmingham	17.31 to 7.10	Birmingham	17.33 to 7.07
Bristol	17.36 to 7.11	Bristol	17.38 to 7.09
Glasgow	17.54 to 7.25	Glasgow	17.36 to 7.24
London	17.28 to 7.01	London	17.28 to 6.59
Manchester	17.31 to 7.13	Manchester	17.33 to 7.11
Newcastle	17.25 to 7.14	Newcastle	17.27 to 7.11
Nottingham	17.29 to 7.06	Nottingham	17.31 to 7.04

AA Roadwatch

London: A1 between Mill Hill Circus and Five-way Corner. Roadworks and restrictions. Until May 31.

London: A211 Blackheath Underpass. Construction. Until April 15.

Buckinghamshire: M40 J13-14 Roadworks and contraflow. Until 1998.

Kent: M2 J5-7. Bridge maintenance and restrictions. Until March 9.

Bristol: M5 J18-19. Major roadworks on Avonmouth Bridge. Until Jan 99.

West Yorks: M1 J43-42. Slurries to Lofthouse (M62). A contraflow and 50mph speed limit in place. Until July 13.

Cambridgeshire: A38 Broom's Barn roundabout. Contraflow. Until June 1.

Somerset: M5 J22-23. Major roadworks and contraflow. Until March 31.

Cambs: A1 Alconbury to Hadden. Construction work. Until December 31 1998.

Suffolk: A12 between Kesgrave and Wrentham. Restrictions. Until March 3.

Derbyshire: A38 South Normanton. Major roadworks. Until March 1.

Leicestershire: M1 J24. Northbound and slip closed. Use J23a. Until April 13.

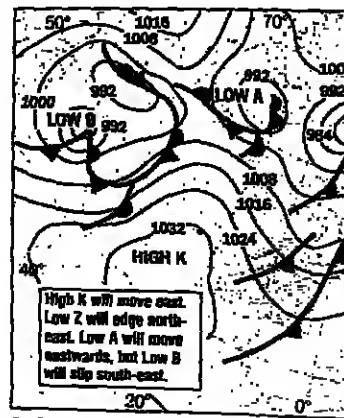
Merseyside: A57 Knowsley Roadworks at M57 junction. Until Dec 31 1998.

North Yorks: A1 Aberford to Garton. Roadworks. Until August 1.

Air quality

Location	NO ₂	SO ₂
London	Good	Good
S. England	Good	Good
Wales	Good	Good
C. England	Good	Good
N. England	Good	Good
Scotland	Good	Good
N. Ireland	Good	Good

Atlantic chart, noon today



World weather most recent available figure at noon local time

Athens	14 57	Florence	13 55	New York	8 48
Auckland	26 73	Frankfurt	13 55	Rio	15 41
B. Aires	23 73	Geneva	11 52	Stockholm	16 41
Bangkok	24 83	Helsinki	11 52	Taipei	11 52
Barcelona	15 59	Hong Kong	17 53	Tokyo	10 45
Berlin	15 59	Isle of Man	11 52	Ulaanbaatar	1 29
Bombay	13 55	Jaipur	1 46	Yokohama	1 27 81
Buenos Aires	13 55	London	12 54		
Budapest	12 54	Los Angeles	13 55		
Cairo	17 53	Madrid	13 55		
Cape Town	23 73	Manila	10 50		
Cebu	23 73	Moscow	17 53		
Christchurch	25 79	Perth	18 50		
Copenhagen	7 45	Wellington	1 28 54		
Darwin	11 55	Washington	0 32		
Delhi	31 89	Zurich	8 48		
Dhaka	1 23 73				

High tides

Location	AM	PM
London	08:01	16:40
Liverpool	05:44	14:22
Avonmouth	00:47	13:31
Hull (Albert Dock)	00:24	13:15
Greenock	05:54	15:06
Donaghadee	05:45	15:01

Sun and moon

Sun rises	07:03
Sun sets	17:25
Moon rises	02:49
Moon sets	11:53

New Moon: Feb 26

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Conspiracies abound as Cole quits 'toughest job in PR'

Was he pushed, or did he fall? Steve Boggan examines the career of the man who fronted for Mohamed Al Fayed

Michael Cole, the bouffant-haired front-man for Harrods owner Mohamed Al Fayed, stepped down yesterday, sparking the kind of conspiracy theories he had fostered under his master since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Fayed. "Did he fall or was he pushed?" was the question being bounced around media circles after the world's most famous department store unexpectedly announced his retirement at the age of 55.

Harrods and Mr Cole, a former BBC Royal Correspondent, issued a joint statement which said the departure was amicable and mutual. But the subsequent unavailability of Mr Cole fanned the flames of speculation. Not only had the announcement been timed to coincide with a Cole family holiday at a secret location, but his home and mobile telephone numbers also went dead. It was an abrupt end to a morbidly momentous year for Mr Cole, who joined Harrods as director of public affairs in 1988 after 27 years as a journalist.

He had borne a huge responsibility in the weeks after the deaths of Diana and Dodi. Some would argue the role was made more difficult because it involved repeating Mr Fayed's insistence that Henri Paul, driver of the car in which the princess and Mr Fayed's son died, had not been drinking excessively. A post-mortem examination showed he was over the limit and had been taking prescription drugs.

More recently, Mr Fayed's claims that the couple were

murdered and that he was told of Diana's "last words" - words which doctors said were never uttered - may have sat awkwardly with Mr Cole's instincts as a former journalist.

During his time with Mr Fayed, Mr Cole projected the smooth, sophisticated face of



Boss: Mohamed Al Fayed

Harrods. Those who have met Mr Fayed know that he is prone to lapse into expletives and raucous anecdotes. During interviews it was not unusual for Mr Cole to interrupt, reminding the diminutive Egyptian that he hadn't meant to say one thing but had really intended to say another. His firefighting exploits on behalf of Mr Fayed involved projecting the Egyptian's argument in his fight over Harrods with arch-enemy Tiny Rowland during the 1980s. They included denying a Department of Trade and Industry report which branded Mr Fayed a liar.

On the battle went throughout the 1990s, Mr Cole voicing

the Egyptian's ire at not being granted British citizenship. Then came the fight against the establishment, paying Tory MPs to ask questions and then exposing them.

Next came complicity in the *Guardian's* battle against Jonathan Aitken, former arms procurement minister, and his denials - shown in court to have been lies - that he was entertained at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel by Saudi arms dealers. Mr Cole began his career in newspapers before moving into independent television and the BBC. He left 20 years later after telling a number of tabloid reporters details of a secret viewing of the Queen's Christmas speech.

The disclosure was not an unprofessional one - it was the sort of confidence shared by specialist journalists all the time. But the confidence was not kept and the details were splashed over the papers the following day. His position became untenable, but few believed he would leave journalism for ever.

He was not universally popular with those who had to deal with him. He dished out information like favours and was known for his tendency to be smooth to the point of obsequiousness.

And he was slavishly loyal to Mr Fayed, even when the Egyptian's treatment of him appeared to observers to be less than respectful. Once, an *Independent on Sunday* journalist was critical of the store after being shown around by Mr Cole. During the visit, the journalist was asked by Mr Fayed if he had

children. When he replied 'yes', Mr Fayed ordered Mr Cole to fetch a small teddy bear and a coffee table book on The Ritz hotel for the journalist.

When the critical article appeared, Mr Cole wrote to the newspaper asking for the gifts back. The book was returned but the bear had already been

given to the child and, with the permission of *The Independent's* editor, it was retained. For several weeks, Mr Cole wrote at the behest of Mr Fayed asking for the teddy bear back.

On another occasion, a colleague and I visited Mr Fayed as part of efforts to prove that a former minister had accepted

diamonds from businessmen for services rendered. We believed Mr Fayed knew the woman buying the diamonds from the MP and asked him to make a phone call to her.

But he could stay on the subject for only a few minutes. Very quickly the conversation moved on to a friend of the woman's.



Michael Cole, taking early retirement after hectic years representing the Harrods boss

Photograph: Robin Mayes

Battle under way to block toll road

LOCAL OBJECTORS yesterday won the right to mount a High Court challenge over the planned construction of the United Kingdom's first privately owned toll road.

The Alliance Against the Birmingham Northern Relief Road was granted leave to seek a judicial review, and Mr Justice Ognall ordered an urgent hearing of the case.

The campaign group Friends of the Earth, which is supporting the challenge, said that the alliance, representing communities along the 27-mile route of the proposed road, were demanding to see a concession agreement between the Department of Transport and Midland Expressway to check whether it contained cancellation charges.

Legal opinion from solicitors Leigh, Day and Co was that it was unlawful to consider cancellation charges when approving a road scheme; to sign a concession agreement containing cancellation charges before a scheme was approved; and to refuse to make public a concession agreement affecting the environment.

FoE said that, before the general election, Labour promised it would not build the road because noise and air pollution would harm the health and amenities of residents. But soon after the party came to power, the road was given the go-ahead.

Gerald Kelis, of West Midlands FoE, said: "The Government has already broken its promise not to build this road. Now it appears to be preventing people from having access to the facts behind it. If the Government has nothing to hide, then it should come clean and produce the documents."

FoE says the road will cut a huge swath through the West Midlands green belt and cross two protected nature sites, destroy scores of homes and blight many others.

Makers of faulty hip to pay for surgery

By Kate Watson-Smyth

The manufacturers of the artificial hip at the centre of a nationwide health scare yesterday offered to pay for "lifelong follow-up" treatment of all patients who have been issued with the implant.

Following a meeting with 3M Health Care, the makers of the faulty hip joint, and Val Gooding, managing director of BUPA, the Department of Health confirmed that 3M would meet the entire costs of "identifying and reviewing" all patients who were fitted with the 3M Capital implant and any revision operations required.

"These operations may be carried out either in a BUPA hospital or an NHS hospital if the patient prefers," said a statement from the Department of Health.

"The company commitment also extends to life-long follow-up of patients implanted with this device."

Earlier, the Government published a list of hospitals who were supplied with the hip joints. More than 80 private and NHS orthopaedic centres were supplied with a total of 4,700 3M Capital implants between 1 August 1991 and 31 March 1997 when the device

was discontinued. All implants are thought to have been used.

Patients fitted with the joints will be contacted by the hospital where they had the surgery and will be invited to have X-rays. Some people will need to have the prosthesis replaced and others will need to be carefully monitored.

Robin Turner, consultant manager for orthopaedics at Brighton Health Care NHS Trust, said they had already started to trace patients.

"When we have established the names of the 264 people who received this particular hip joint we will arrange for them to return to the hospital for a clinical check-up and X-ray. We anticipate that it will take two to three weeks to cross-check all the medical records to identify the patients concerned."

3M Health Care Ltd, based in Loughborough, could face a total bill of £23m if all 4,700 patients need a revision operation costing £5,000 a time.

The warning about the hip was issued after studies from three hospitals revealed that up to 21 per cent of these implants failed within five years compared with the national average of 10 per cent 10 years after the operation.

WORST AFFECTED HOSPITALS

Hospitals with 50 or more recorded implants	515
England: Lancaster Moor Hospital (Garnet Clinic)	504
St Mary's Hospital, Newport, Isle of Wight	292
Royal Oldham Hospital, Oldham	272
Southampton General Hospital (Pharm Scores), Southampton	264
Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton	252
Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon	249
Royal Lancaster Infirmary, Lancaster	247
Kidderrins General Hospital	239
Bassettlaw District General Hospital, Workop	189
Scarborough General Hospital	175
Wexham and St Albans Hospital, Kendal	129
Lancaster and Lakeside Hospital	120
Princess Alexandra, Wrotham, Swindon	112
Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital, Mansfield	111
Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital, Hampshire	89
Sussex Nutfield Hospital, Brighton	84
Dewsbury Royal Hospital, Bolton	78
BUPA Cheltenham Hospital, Southampton	72
Royal Hallam Infirmary	59
Conquest Hospital, St Leonards on Sea	51
Duchess of Kent Military Hospital, Catterick Garrison	51
Waterloo East Gloucester Hospital, Porton	51
Gwynedd Hospital, Bangor	51
Scotlands	51
Between 50 and 50 implants mostly at Garrahal Hospital, Glasgow	
Northern Ireland: None recorded	

Jury unable to reach verdict in Docklands bomb case

A man accused of the Docklands bombing which ended the IRA's 18-month ceasefire and killed two people will have a retrial after a jury at the Old Bailey was unable to agree on verdicts yesterday, writes Jason Bennett.

The jury of seven men and four women was discharged after they sent a note to the judge saying: "The jury is unable to reach a unanimous or majority verdict and we feel we have exhausted all possible avenues." This followed deliberation of more than nine hours over two days after a five week trial. The judge, Mr Justice Blofield, signalled that a retrial will take place.

James McCordle, 29, had been accused of planting the giant lorry bomb at South Quay, east London, that exploded on 9 February 1996 killing two people. Mr McCordle from Crossmaglen, denies two charges of murder and conspiracy to cause explosions between 30 October 1995 and 10 February 1996.

Ear prints trap burglar

AN OVER-CAREFUL burglar, who made legal history after he was fingered by police for leaving his ear prints at the scene of his crimes, was jailed for a year yesterday. Calvin Sewell, 33, always listened carefully to make sure no one was around before breaking in. But pressing the vital organs against doors and windows in 13 different places proved to be a fatal mistake, and made the thief the first criminal in Britain to have a mould taken of his ear by police. An expert in facial mapping then came up with a perfect match. Southwark Crown Court in London heard. The investigating police officer plans to urge colleagues to be on the lookout for tell-tale ear prints during future investigations.

Cut-price tickets for Dome

Cut-price tickets are to be offered for entry to the Millennium Dome and local residents in the borough of Greenwich, south-east London, could get free entrance under plans to be announced next week by Peter Mandelson, the minister responsible for the project, writes Colin Brown.

Mr Mandelson, who will appear on the BBC's *Breakfast with Frost* from the Dome tomorrow, is due to announce details on Tuesday of the plans for exhibitions inside the Dome, including an androgenous human figure as high as Nelson's column and taller than the Statue of Liberty.

Warrant for singer Morrison

A WARRANT was yesterday issued for the arrest of soul singer Mark Morrison after he jumped bail for the seventh time in two months. The 25-year-old failed to turn up at Leicester Crown Court to be sentenced for sending an imposter to carry out Community Service on his behalf. The court was told the singing star - who had a number one hit with "Return of the Mack" - was in Barbados for "drug rehabilitation".

It was the third warrant - not backed for bail - to be issued for Leicester born Morrison, who now lives in London.

Magnet chief loses court bid

ALAN Bowkett, chief executive of the Berisford group, yesterday failed to win an injunction stopping strikers at Magnet's kitchens, the company's subsidiary, demonstrating near his Cambridgebridge mansion. The High Court, however, agreed to hear both sides of the argument next Wednesday.

PRODUCT RECALL



Crispy Pancakes and Crepes

Following the Findus Minced Beef Crispy Pancake Product Recall earlier this week, Findus is now recalling all Findus Crispy Pancakes and Crepes with Best Before End Dates of JUL 99 and AUG 99 as a precautionary measure. This is due to finding small cubic pieces of glass in a second variety of Crispy Pancakes. We emphasise that Findus is taking this precaution in the interests of customer safety.

These Best Before End codes can be found on the front side panel of the pack:

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AUG 99**

Findus wish to reassure our customers that we are treating this incident very seriously and are carrying out detailed investigations into this problem. Findus has requested police involvement in order to satisfactorily resolve this matter.

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Confident: Damon Rose beat 350 people to join the BBC as a trainee. His first report for television goes out on Tuesday

'So, I'm blind. Why shouldn't I be a BBC television director?'

By Louise Jury

THE BBC has accepted its first blind man on to a trainee directors' course. Twenty-seven-year-old Damon Rose beat 350 people to join the Corporation at the beginning of December and his first report will be broadcast on Tuesday.

The training scheme specially for disabled applicants takes two recruits a year and is organised by the BBC's disability programmes unit, which includes 15 disabled people.

They spend their first six months with the unit, but Mr Rose will complete his two-year training in other departments where he will face competition alongside others also wanting placements.

Mr Rose, who lives at Sittingbourne in Kent, said yesterday that he had been delighted to get on to the production course.

"I was extremely happy that the people at the unit felt that my sightlessness wasn't a barrier. I knew that I could do it, but it's nice to have that confirmed."

Mr Rose said that he found it totally unsurprising that someone who could not see should want to work in television, particularly when more

blind people "watched" television than listened to the radio.

"Blind people watch *East-Enders* and *Coronation Street* as part of the culture. And it's not just a visual medium - there is sound."

Mr Rose was a television addict before he lost his sight at the age of 13.

"It's obviously proved very useful. I was very, very au fait with television forms," he said.

Mr Rose said that if the job of a television director was analysed then the vast majority of the work was carried out in the office.

Only when he got to the shooting stage did he rely on the members of the crew to tell him what was in shot.

He added: "But the director doesn't do the camera work, that is the whole point. They direct. I plan the shot in my head."

Overcoming prejudice was the main problem, he said. "I do things differently, but I'm not ashamed of that. I'm equal but different."

"I'm happy to be the first blind person doing this. I'd like to think this coverage might open people's minds a bit."

Ian Macrae, editor of the BBC's disability programmes unit, which was set up seven

years ago, said Mr Rose's training, including research, television writing and a camera-work course, was what any trainee would do.

Explaining the recruitment policy, Mr Macrae said: "There aren't enough disabled people on television, and one reason why... is because there aren't enough disabled people in the industry."

He added: "We aim to address both these things."

Mr Rose's first report, about cars and the visually impaired, will be shown in BBC2's *From The Edge* magazine programme, billed as made by disabled people about disabled people but for everybody to watch, on Tuesday.

Although Mr Rose is thought to be the first blind director, the BBC correspondent on disability affairs, Peter White, is blind, and Mr Macrae himself is visually impaired.

Richard Lane, of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, said: "I really do think it's brilliant he's doing this. It does shatter the stereotypes. But he is definitely the exception rather than the norm. For [completely] blind people of working age only 17 per cent are working compared to 31 per cent of disabled people."

Judge outlaws water company 'smart cards'

Local councils are welcoming a High Court judge's landmark decision yesterday banning water companies from using new electronic "smart" card payment systems to cut off customers who do not pay their bills.

Unless overturned on appeal, the ruling could lead to pre-payment water devices in thousands of homes nationwide having to be removed, or radically changed so that households cannot be disconnected unlawfully.

Today's test case marked a victory for six local authorities who challenged the legality of the devices, known as budget payment units (BPU's). They cited an "astronomically high and frightening" number of disconnections that posed a threat to public health and increased fire risks.

Mr Justice Harrison declared the BPU's were unlawful because they did not accord with the statutory code of practice for the water industry under the 1991 Water Industry Act. They failed to comply with "numerous safeguards" under the code intended to protect from disconnection poor families and vulnerable people who got into difficulties with payments.

He overturned a refusal by Ian Byatt, Director General of

Water Services, to compel water companies North West Water and Severn Trent to abandon the pre-payment devices.

The water companies argued that the new systems were lawful because BPU customers were never disconnected by the companies, but disconnected themselves when they failed to pay for their smart card, or key, to be charged with "units of credit". The judge described the argument as "superficially attractive, but, in my view, it is not logically correct".

He agreed that the case raised issues of public importance and gave the Director General leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal.

Today's ruling was won by Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham city councils, Lancashire County Council and Tameside and Oldham metropolitan borough councils. Overall, at least 30 local authorities around the country supported the court action.

Oldham's spokeswoman, Councillor John Johnson, said the decision was "a victory for common sense as it is for the good maintenance of public health".

Birmingham City Council said later its officers had been monitoring "extremely high"

levels of disconnections by devices operated by Severn Trent. Council leader Theresa Stewart said: "Naturally we are very pleased at the High Court's decision. We have always felt that it was wrong for the Director General to allow water companies to install these devices and disconnect households who cannot afford to pay their bill."

"It simply did not take into account the need to respect the current customer safeguards which Parliament put in place, or consider the very real public health risks which would follow widespread installations."

Public service union Unison described the ruling as "very good news, particularly for poor families and customers who have difficulty paying their bills". The union's head of water, Alex Thompson, said: "The real danger with the introduction of smart cards is that they become compulsory for customers who get into debt, leading to whole families being left without water."

The judge's decision will come as a blow to the water industry. It had regarded the introduction of BPU's as a success, and warned it would suffer "substantial financial loss, prejudice and hardship" if the new devices had to be abandoned.

Major investigation into offshore deaths

A full-scale investigation was yesterday under way following the deaths of two offshore workers in the North Sea.

Forty-two year-old James Kiloh, from Aberdeen, and Anthony Doherty, 45, from Derby, died after spending around 40 minutes in the water.

Mr Kiloh fell overboard on Thursday afternoon during a routine inspection of the unmanned MCP-01 platform, which is operated by Total and lies around 100 miles North-east of Peterhead.

He then became trapped between the inner core of the platform and the outer breakwater wall as colleagues tried to reach him.

Mr Doherty, who was on board a fast rescue craft, jumped into the water and climbed through a hole in the

outer wall in an attempt to reach Mr Kiloh.

He managed to grab Mr Kiloh but lost his grip, and it is thought he may then have detached the lifeline he had fastened to himself.

Both men were recovered from the water after about 40 minutes and flown to hospital in Aberdeen, where they were later pronounced dead.

Mr Doherty worked for Vector Offshore. Mr Kiloh, who was married with an eight-year-old son, Lee, worked for McGregor Energy, and was part of an 18-strong maintenance team sent to the platform.

He is thought to have slipped from the walkway during a routine inspection, and fell around 40ft to the water below.

Both men were eventually recovered from the water when

helicopter co-pilot Neil Gordon managed to reach them with the help of a portable ladder.

A top-level inquiry into the tragedy was launched, with Health and Safety Executive officers, police and members of Total's own inspection team due to fly out as soon as weather conditions permitted. Lucien Lalier, managing director of Total Oil Marine, said the company was "shocked and saddened" by the deaths, the first to occur at one of its platforms in recent years.

He added that all the companies involved wanted to express their deep sympathy to the bereaved families.

It is thought that conditions inside the concrete breakwater would have been even colder than in the open sea, and that both men suffered hypothermia.

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HEW

Music education campaigners press for a little bit of rhythm in the national curriculum

By Judith Judd
Education Editor

MUSIC should be the fourth "R" (rhythm) in the curriculum, campaigners told the Government yesterday. All the groups involved in music education published a new booklet on research which shows that learning music improves children's performance in other subjects.

The Campaign for Music in the Curriculum is worried by the Government's decision last month to urge primary schools to concentrate on literacy and numeracy. Supporters fear that music will be squeezed out of the timetable. While the Government is insisting on an hour a day each for literacy and numeracy, the campaign wants at least an hour a week for music.

The pamphlet from the Music Education Council, the Music Industries Association and the National Music Council, highlights research from Hungary, Switzerland and the United States showing how music improves children's overall academic performance.

Experiments in Hungary in the Fifties comparing children attending primary schools and those attending special music schools found that the latter were better at memorising and at understanding stories and managed their time more efficiently.

An experiment involving 1,200 children in 50 classes in Switzerland in the late Eighties and early Nineties showed that children given three extra music lessons a week instead of other lessons were better at languages and no worse at maths even though they were receiving fewer lessons in those subjects. They also learnt to read more easily. Children in the extra music classes got on better together, researchers suggested, because they had to learn to listen to each other and use teamwork.

Most recently, work at the University of California has suggested that music modifies circuits in the brain, including some that have no obvious connection to music, so that

spatial reasoning, vital in science, is strengthened.

Researchers also found that students who listened to Mozart every day learnt more quickly than those who did not. The pamphlet challenges the view that the association of music with higher academic standards is the result of the social class or the better education of the type of children who learn music.

Experiments in Rhode Island in the United States with inner-city children found that, though they lagged behind in reading and maths at the start of a project in which they were given extra music lessons, by the end, they had caught up in reading and were ahead in maths.

The pamphlet argues that music is for everyone, not just for a talented few. "There is no inherent reason for any child not to learn music as there are no large individual differences in innate musical gifts and talents... the very wide differences in musical accomplishment that exist can be largely attributed to social and motivational factors."



Orchestral manoeuvres: Pupils rehearsing at school. However, campaigners fear music is being squeezed out of the timetable and Photograph: Rui Xavier

Threat of revolt in Lords on college fees

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

THE "HAUGHTY manner" of Baroness Blackstone was being last night for contributing to the risk of an embarrassing government defeat in the Lords which could throw into chaos its plan to introduce £1,000-a-year student fees.

Some senior peers were blaming the "arrogance" of the education minister in the Lords, for the Government's difficulties. They are upset that Lady Blackstone has failed to provide assurances about the level of the fees that will be imposed on students by the universities, and the practicality of introducing means testing in time for the autumn term.

A Tory spokesman said: "We are planning to vote with the Liberal Democrats, which means the Government will be defeated. The Government's main clauses on fees would have to be tabled again and debated again."

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"There is some very bad blood about Baroness Blackstone in the Lords," said one leading House of Lords source. "She has always been had in the Lords. She has this arrogant, haughty manner. She always looks as though she is looking down her nose at you. She doesn't seem to like it in the Lords. She gives you the impression she would prefer talking to Fellows of All Souls."

The Liberal Democrat peers and the Conservatives led by Baroness Blatch, the former minister, are threatening to join forces to defeat the Government on Monday in the Lords on the Teaching and Higher Education Bill, which puts the plans for student fees into effect.

Both opposition parties have complained that the Government is proposing means-tested fees of £1,000 a year, but

A number of left-wing Labour MPs are also threatening to rebel when the Bill goes to the House of Commons to complete its passage through Parliament. One leading left-wing MP said the rebellion could be as big as the vote against the Government's cuts in one-parent benefits.

The universities are also unhappy with the Government's handling of the introduction of the fees. A Liberal Democrat spokesman said: "Strathclyde University told me all their means testing goes out to an agency. We don't think they will be able to finish it in time. They won't know what to charge students."

Call for inquiry into mine tragedy

Union leaders yesterday called for a public inquiry into an accident at one of Europe's largest opencast mines which left one man dead and several seriously injured. The tragedy happened when a dumper truck collided with a personnel carrier which rolled over, trapping 18 miners inside.

One man died on the way to hospital and another five remain seriously ill with chest and spinal injuries. The Transport and General Workers Union are urging Scottish industry minister Brian Wilson to launch an investigation into the accident, which happened shortly after 7pm on Thursday at Dalquharry Quarry at Coalburn, in Lanarkshire.

TGWU Scottish Secretary Jim Elsie said they were also calling on Scottish Coal, which owns the Lanarkshire site, to ensure there are union representatives on all its sites "to assist in the whole issue of health and safety at work". He said: "Health and safety legislation in the opencast industry is less stringent than that in deep mining and... workers are being asked to work around the clock."

"The coal site at Coalburn is under franchise from Scottish Coal to Crouch Mining who, for many years, have been anti-trade union. We have tried on several occasions to gain access to the site but this has always been denied." Mr Elsie said they would approach STUC general secretary Campbell Christie, who is a director with Mining Scotland, the parent company of Scottish Coal, to help the union in lobbying for support. Mr Christie has confirmed he would seek a review of arrangements to consider whether health and safety standards were being properly applied.

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Josephine Hayes: Taking Attorney-General to tribunal

Lord Irvine, and a spot bother with women

Second lawyer puts Lord Chancellor in the dock over 'old boy network'

By byline
title

FRESH allegations of "old boys' networks" in the judiciary surfaced yesterday as a woman barrister announced that she is suing the Attorney-General for sex discrimination.

The case is likely to cause further embarrassment to Lord Irvine of Lairg, the Lord Chancellor, who is in charge of the Attorney-General's office. Two weeks ago, Lord Irvine was himself accused of operating an illegal 'old boys' network by solicitor Jane Coker, who is also bringing a discrimination case.

Josephine Hayes lodged her complaint against John Morris the Attorney-General, with an industrial tribunal in south London earlier this week. She is suing on the grounds that the Government shows bias in favour of men when appointing lawyers to represent it in civil cases.

Ms Hayes's lawyer, Sara Leslie of Irwin Mitchell in London, said her client is taking action over appointments to four lists of lawyers used to represent the Government.

Ms Leslie says the names on three of the lists are exclusively male. On the fourth there are



Lord Irvine: Second case likely to embarrass him after being accused of operating an 'old boys' network'

13 women out of 71 names, but this list is known as the supplementary list and deals with more routine and minor cases.

"What Josephine Hayes claims is that she is an excellent candidate for one of these jobs but has never been given the opportunity to be considered or apply. What we are saying is that there is no objective selection criteria and no application of equal

opportunities," said Ms Leslie.

Ms Hayes has a first class law degree from Oxford University and a master's degree from Yale University in America. She is a junior counsel who has been in civil practice for 16 years and is also chairwoman of the Association of Women Barristers.

Ms Leslie said the appointment of lawyers to the lists was

known within the profession as the "secret soundings".

She added: "We understand the Attorney-General makes appointments taking the views of the Treasury Solicitor, government departments, members of the judiciary and senior members of the Bar - what is known as 'secret soundings'."

"Applicants are restricted to barristers these particular people happen to know. The upshot of it is out of 116 barristers acting for the Government in civil proceedings only 13 are women... a very small proportion of the women in practice where 28 per cent of barristers are women."

"Unless the system is transparent there can be no confidence that gender is not a criteria for appointments."

She added: "Sex is an issue because the lists are so predominantly male."

However, the Attorney-General yesterday rejected Ms Hayes's claim. A statement from his office said: "The Attorney-General rejects any suggestion of discrimination and will strongly oppose this application."

The tribunal is expected to have a hearing within the next three or four months.



Jane Coker: Claims discrimination. Photograph: Ben Gurr

Grace and favours: Lord Chancellor may open refurbished doors to the public

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Public tours of Lord Irvine of Lairg's lavish grace and favour apartment at the House of Lords could be started in April, Downing Street said yesterday as the Government fought to damp down the latest controversy over the Lord Chancellor's

loan of over 80 paintings for the walls of his rooms.

The Prime Minister's spokesman said there were no plans to charge the public for touring the Lord Chancellor's rooms, although the continuing controversy over the £650,000 refurbishment must make them one of the top tourist attractions in the capital.

His latest acquisitions of paintings from four galleries - the Royal Academy, the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, the Imperial War Museum, and the National Gallery of Scotland - are likely to enhance interest in the most controversial interior redesign in London, in spite of the works being dismissed by

Downing Street as "not of the top rank".

The spokesman for Tony Blair denied reports that the artwork which will adorn the walls, themselves to be covered in expensive wallpaper, has been "looted" from Scottish galleries. "One newspaper said they had been removed; it gave the impression they are being

taken away. They have come from their reserve collections. In other words, they are all in cellars. They are not on display. None of them is on a wall anywhere. The galleries are extremely happy they will in due course be on display in the Lord Chancellor's residence which is going to be open to the public."

But that failed to impress

the Scottish National Party leader, Alex Salmond, who said: "Derry Irvine is displaying a breathtaking arrogance which is entirely in character. His looting and pillaging of Scottish art works will cause great anger both in the artist and academic worlds."

"Taking them down to Derry Irvine's house in London is

nothing to do with access but everything to do with self-aggrandisement."

Francis Maude, the Tory spokesman on culture, said: "Power has gone to his head. Not to mention his furniture. It is not surprising his colleagues are getting fed up with it all. He has already had a carpeting and now he is on the canvas. Is

it going to be curtains for Lord Irvine?"

The Downing Street spokesman said the Lord Chancellor's department was working out access arrangements with House of Lords authorities, though these might take the form of organised access for groups. However, the intention was to secure "significant public access".

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Dear Richard and Virgin,

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In 1994 at the age of 31, I suffered a heart attack (something that I believe is happening more and more to younger people). I was not, regrettably, covered for such an eventuality, being so young.

Being self-employed, I had to get back to work asap. I had a mortgage at mid-term, a wife and two young children to support. What I received from the state was a pittance. I was compelled to return to work much earlier than we would have liked. Without realising it, I was pitching myself into a downward spiral that would further affect my health. When I returned to work, I found that just to survive I now had to work longer and harder to cover the debt I'd accumulated during the period of illness. This, I'm afraid, had the eventual effect in May 1997 of a second attack. I've now got over this

second setback and again have returned somewhat prematurely to work. With the overall accumulated debt, we were staring ultimate ruin in the face if I had not done this. Since going back to work, after being back for only one month, I have been signed off sick again with angina (chest pains).



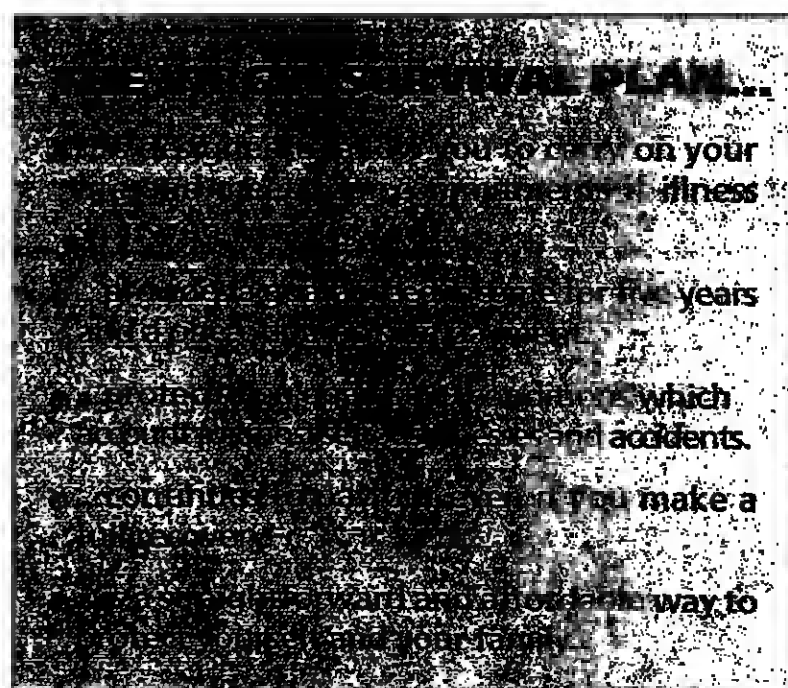
I can not stress strongly enough how important it is, specially for younger people with mortgages and families, to get this cover, as I feel that with the same hindsight, and five years to get back on my feet, I would without doubt not be in the position that I find myself in today.

I'm not after sympathy, but implore you to hammer home the need for this, so that as few families as possible have to go through this devastating situation.

Yours sincerely,

A. R. Salmon

Andrew Robert Salmon



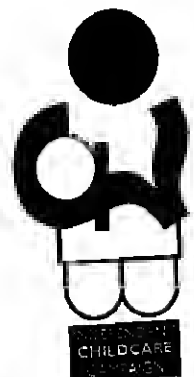
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How Britain lags behind the rest of Europe



WORLDS APART

By Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

Britain has little statutory childcare provision and little help with childcare for mothers. Usually the limited number of public childcare places available are for children deemed to be "at risk".

Comparing Britain with three other countries shows the greater state involvement in caring for children with twofold purposes: to encourage par-



French without tears:
A writing class across the Channel, where things are much better organised
Photograph: Raphael Gaillard/FSP

ents into employment and to help children to develop.

Only 41 per cent of lone mothers in Britain are employed, compared to 82 per cent

in France, and 70 per cent in Sweden.

In Europe only Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland have lower employment rates.

This week *The Independent* launched its campaign for a tax allowance for working mothers, urging the Chancellor to invest in the nation's children.

Parents in Britain pay a higher percentage of the cost of childcare than in virtually any other advanced economy. We feel there are lessons to be

learned from other countries and with 1.1 million women expected to enter the workforce by 2006 unless something is done about childcare we face se-

rious problems. In France childcare is heavily subsidised and there is a long tradition of early childhood education in the public sector.

After crèches for 0-three-year-olds, the state makes universal educational provision for children aged three to school-entry age at *écoles maternelles*, which are provided to help parents in employment but also to help the child develop.

These state-funded institutions are an accepted way of life for children and 35 per cent of three to six-year olds attend.

In recent years, two-year-olds have been admitted and the handful of *écoles maternelles* that are run privately receive state subsidies.

Alternatively, French families can employ an *assistante maternelle*, or childminder. They receive financial support in the form of a grant and a payment to cover social security contributions.

For schoolchildren up to 17 years there are recreation centres, *Centre de Loisirs sans Hébergement*, that provide care from 8am to 6pm or 7pm. These come under the Ministry for Youth and Sport at a local level and are sometimes subsidised by private companies.

Scandinavia has long been seen as a symbol of child-friendly

ly policies. In Sweden, public funds meet the costs of day care for 72 per cent of three to six-year-olds (compulsory schooling does not start until seven).

Parents are provided with *daghem* - day-care centres, typically open between 6am and 6.30pm and for those who want to stay at home to look after their children, they qualify for payment by the state of 360 days or 90 per cent of their previous income, plus an additional 90 days on a flat daily rate of SKr60 (about £6).

Other services include *Säbbsverksamhet*, pre-primary schooling for children and *Fritidshem*, centres providing care and recreation for school-age children up to 12 years.

The US is one of the countries Britain is watching most closely after President Bill Clinton's State of the Union address last month.

In America the drive to get lone parents off welfare has been run in conjunction with more childcare provision.

The President announced last month that \$20bn will be spent over the next five years on childcare to help working families pay for care, build after-school programmes and emphasis quality of care through research and monitoring.

The number of children receiving childcare subsidies will double to 2 million by the year 2003 and tax credits are also to be increased for three million families.

A new tax credit will also be offered to businesses that offer childcare services to their employees. After-school care will also be opened up to 500,000 children - at present there are five million latchkey kids in the US.

Head Start, the scheme for children from a deprived background which has shown good results has also been given more money to reach 1m children by 2002.

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Why it's easier being a mother in France

FRENCH VIEW

By Lucy Reid
in Paris

LAURE has just had her first baby. A trainee teacher, aged 24, she is due to return to work in April, when Léa is 12 weeks old. Since her husband is a student and the family relies on her income, she is mapping out her campaign to find a childcare place for her baby.

The French system boasts a wide range of reasonably-priced, pre-school care facilities. The problem - as always in France - is that you have to know the ins and outs of a baffling system. Places are highly-prized and hard to come by. Legend has it that it is harder to find the right place in a crèche in France than to get into university.

Laure said: "You need to be organised and start place-hunting early on, especially in Paris. I began looking when I was four months pregnant. We want a place in a city crèche, but have been told that none is available before September."

Between April and September Léa will go to an "assistante maternelle" (child-minder), which is far more expensive - about £18 a day as opposed to £8 in a crèche. "Even then it's the same thing - we won't know whether a place is available until very late in the day. We are left playing a waiting game."

Working women like Laure have five basic childcare options within the French state system. In Paris, very young children with two working parents can be sent to city crèches from the age of 10 weeks. A parent who is unemployed at the time of admission has two-and-a-half months to find a job, after which time the child will be "excluded" from the crèche.

Payment operates on a sliding scale of £1.10 to £8.90 a day, according to income. While

there is no official means test, parents must submit evidence of their income, as all establishments are required to balance the number of low and high income families. Fees are variable according to how many children attend (the more children you have, the cheaper it is).

The "assistante maternelle agréée libérale" (registered childminder operating in her own home) is a more expensive possibility, but the most favoured method of childcare in France. Two out of three children under the age of three are looked after by childminders.

Any parent, regardless of income, can claim benefits to cover the cost of the childminder's National Insurance charges, and claim 25 per cent of the childminder's fees (up to £1,500 per child) against tax.

Mothers working only part-time can turn to "Haltes-Garderies". Children (from 0-6 years) are admitted for three sessions a week (12 hours in total). Single parents and students can have five sessions a week.

Fourthly, there is the state nursery school (La Maternelle). Admission is from the age of two, on the strict condition that the child is potty-trained. In practice, priority is given to older children, because of a shortage of places. Nursery school is free for all, but less well-off families, single-parent families and families with two working parents go to the top of the waiting lists.

Finally, parents wishing to have their child looked after at home can claim the "Aide à la Garde de l'Enfant à Domicile" (Aid for looking after children at home), which the Socialist government cut last year. The AGED, available to two working parents earning less than £30,000, now provides a tax break of up to £3,600 a year per child under three and less for older children and wealthier parents.

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Courts to accept digital evidence

Pictures and images produced from digital technology can be safely used as evidence in courts, a House of Lords committee said yesterday.

But the Lords select committee on science and technology called for greater control over closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance systems operating in public places.

It also warned that public confidence in CCTV systems would be damaged if images from them were passed too often to television companies for entertainment use.

The Lords inquiry, which took evidence from the Crown Prosecution Service and the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "We were pleased to find that digital images, which we initially thought might create difficulties for the courts, do not."

But it recommended new measures to authenticate the images. Chaired by Lord Craig of Radley, the committee also suggested there should be a uniform policy on the control and release of CCTV images from publicly owned surveillance systems. It quoted a case where images of a man attempting to commit suicide were released by Brentwood Council to the BBC, prompting the man to seek a judicial review. The High Court, however, found there had been no breach of the law.

The committee also said it had learned that police authorities might be paid by the media for tapes used in a variety of television programmes.

The human rights organisation Justice welcomed the committee's call for tighter controls. Its senior legal officer, Madeleine Colvin, said: "CCTV is more than a tool for reducing crime. It also provides the ability to watch and record people in public places. It therefore raises important civil liberties issues."

Lottery firm is given deadline to come clean

By Kate Watson-Smyth

The Camelot shareholders Gtech have been given 17 days to prove they are "fit and proper" to be involved in running the National Lottery, it was announced yesterday.

John Stoker, acting regulator of Oflot, said he was satisfied all links between Gtech and its disgraced former director Guy Snowden had been severed in the wake of allegations that he tried to bribe Richard Branson, but he said the company still needed to dispel concerns over its ethics and business practices before he could decide whether Camelot should carry on running the lottery.

The company has been given until 9 March to give assurances on the legality of Gtech business practices both past and present around the world. Under terms of the National Lottery Act, the licence to run the game can be revoked if any person managing the lottery or benefiting from it "is not a fit and proper person to do so."

Mr Snowden, the then head

of US-based Gtech, resigned nearly three weeks ago after Mr Branson was awarded £100,000 in damages over Mr Snowden's alleged attempt to bribe him into abandoning his attempt to secure the franchise.

The jury accepted that the Virgin tycoon was telling the truth when he claimed that Mr Snowden offered the bribe as the two men hunched at Mr Branson's London home in 1993. Following an initial investigation in the wake of the hearing, Mr Stoker, who was appointed acting regulator after Peter Davis's resignation, said he noted that no evidence had been put forward during the hearing that the board of Gtech had been involved in the attempted bribe.

He added that no Gtech officials had been found guilty of wrongdoing in the US "in the furtherance of Gtech's interests".

But he said: "I have noted also the gravity of the fact that Mr Snowden, as chairman and chief executive of the company, offered a bribe to Mr Branson;

the view expressed by Mr Branson and others that he did so as the company's *alter ego*; and continuing concern about some of Gtech's apparent business practices in the United States."

"I have asked the board of Gtech Holdings Corporation, by March 9 to provide me with evidence in support of their fitness and propriety to be involved in and benefit from the UK National Lottery."

"Having considered their representations ... I will reach my conclusions on whether it would be appropriate for me to take further action under the National Lottery Act 1993."

He added that he was satisfied that Mr Snowden's resignation from the board of Gtech and its US parent company, Gtech Corporation, had removed him from influence over the UK Lottery. Although Mr Snowden still has a 1 per cent shareholding in Gtech, Mr Stoker said this was not grounds enough to revoke Camelot's licence.

But he warned if that shareholding were to grow in future, giving Mr Snowden influence

Redwood takes to the road

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

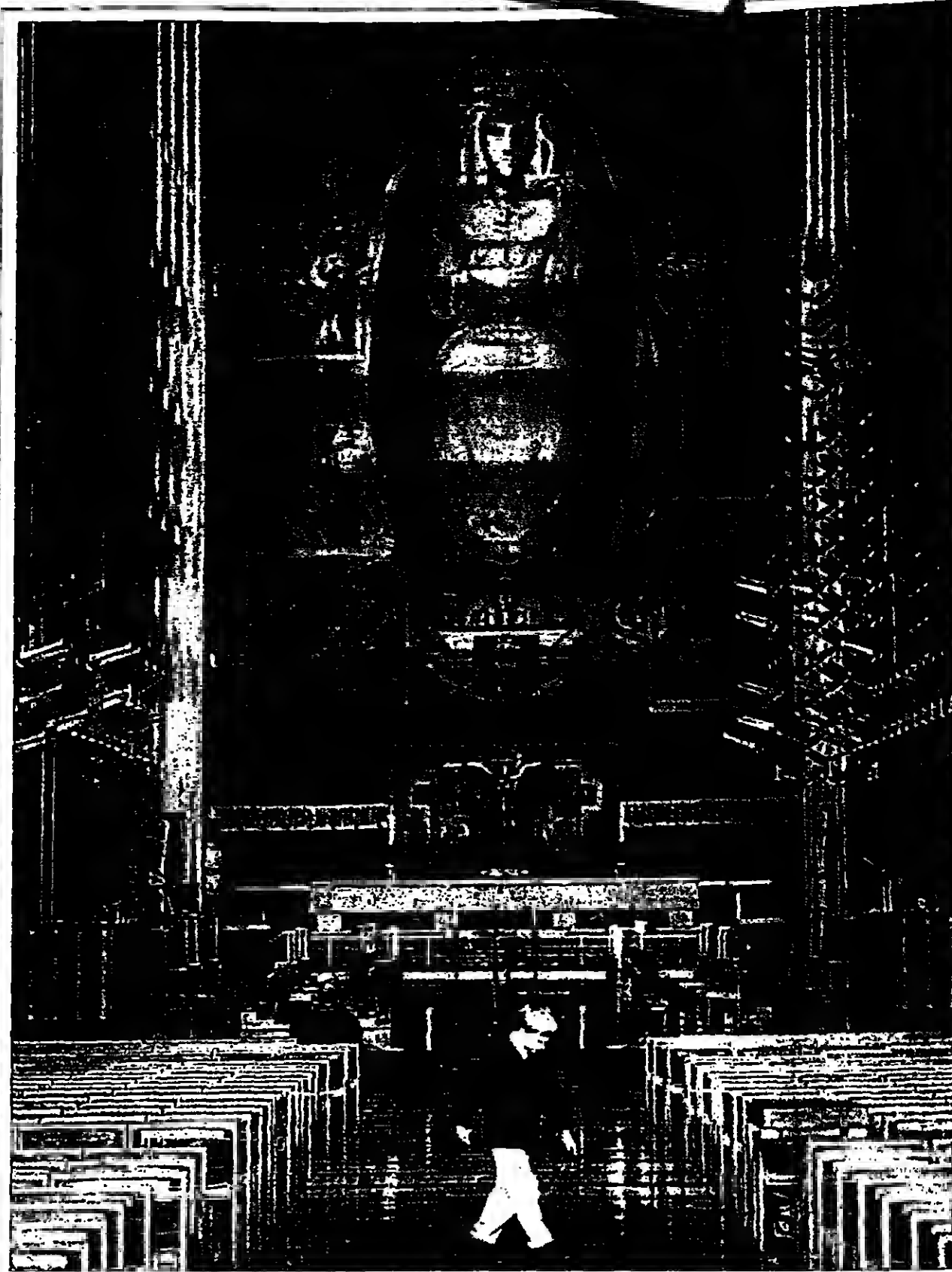
John Redwood is planning to bounce back after being slapped down by William Hague by spearheading a Tory roadshow on the risks facing Britain over the single currency.

The shadow trade and industry secretary, who was forced to withdraw critical comments about the City of London honouring Chancellor Helmut Kohl, will begin a tour of Moo-

day in Sunderland. What is certain to be dubbed the Redwood Euro-sceptic roadshow has dates set for Newcastle, Edinburgh, Reading, Birmingham, Manchester and Exeter.

Mr Hague's approval for the leading Euro-sceptic to take a tour on the single currency will dismay pro-euro "grandees" of the party led by Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke, who are holding a pro-Emu seminar at the Commons next month with business leaders.

Mr Hague today will tell Tory councillors at a conference in London that he is seeking a change of culture in the party in favour of local government. Criticising his predecessors, Lady Thatcher and John Major, he will say: "For too long we treated local government, local government elections and local councillors as though they didn't matter. We spent too much time reorganising local government and not enough time campaigning for it."



Colour revival: Coventry Cathedral's tapestry, which has just been cleaned at a cost of £17,000. Graham Sutherland's 74ft by 38ft *Christ in Glory*, made 36 years ago, is the biggest one-piece tapestry ever produced. Photograph: Tom Pijston



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Duke's wedding cake goes for £17,000

PRIVATE and personal possessions of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were attracting fevered interest at sales continued at Sotheby's in New York yesterday.

Reports of the bidding frenzy descended into the ridiculous as it was reported that a 61-year-old piece of wedding cake sold for \$26,000 (£17,300). Though likely very stale by now, the cake, sealed in a 3m-square white box, had been valued at up to \$1,000 (£660) in a pre-sale estimate.

More than 40,000 lots are being sold from the Bois de Boulogne mansion in Paris where the royal couple lived in exile after the abdication crisis in 1936. The sale was arranged by Mohamed Al Fayed, the owner of Harrods who now owns the property.

The opening session of the sale, which will take place over nine days, attracted an audience of more than 1,000

potential buyers and telephone bids from across the world. Among the lots is the table on which the Duke, then Edward VIII, signed his abdication in 1936 so that he could marry "the woman I love" - Wallis Simpson.

"This is the biggest auction we've ever held in the United States, and as a royal collection, more or less unprecedented in history," said Sotheby's expert Joe Friedman. "One has to go back to the 17th century to find anything comparable - the sale of the possessions of Charles I."

An early highlight was the sale of a ceremonial sword given to Edward in July 1911 to mark his installation as a duke. Valued at up to £36,000, the sword sold for £28,000.

A portrait of the Duchess by the late British painter Cecil Beaton, valued before the sale at £10,000, was purchased for £80,000.



Up and away: Brian Milton, 55, at the helm of his single-engine GT Global Flyer; he and co-pilot Keith Reynolds, 45, will set off from London at the end of March for an 80-day trip to attempt the first circumnavigation of the globe by a microlight aircraft, in the 125th anniversary year of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Photograph: Andrew Burman

Inquiry to look into CJD link with water

By Charles Arthur
Science Editor

The official BSE inquiry is to consider claims that five of the cases of "human BSE" in the UK could have been caused by material from infected cattle leaking into water supplies.

A spokeswoman for the investigation confirmed yesterday that it will examine allegations by Dr Alao Colchester, consultant neurologist at Guy's Hospital in London, who believes water in Kent may have been contaminated by a rendering plant which disposed of the remains of cattle with BSE.

But she emphasised that such consideration is part of the inquiry's wide-ranging consideration of written evidence from all quarters, in its attempt to understand how the cattle disease became epidemic in the UK, and how it led to the fatal human disorder of "new variant" Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (v-CJD), which has so far killed 23 Britons.

"We are involved in taking evidence from all the scientists who we think the inquiry should hear from," the spokeswoman said. "We are not singling out anyone at this stage."

However early next month the inquiry, led by Lord Justice Phillips, will start calling people to give oral evidence as a follow up to the present collection of written data.

Five of the 23 people who have died from v-CJD came from Kent and two others had connections with the county. Dr Colchester treated a number of the cases in the Ashford area. Speaking yesterday on the Radio 4 *Today* programme, he expressed concern about Thruxton Mill, just outside Canterbury, one of four rendering plants asked by the Government to handle hundreds of tons of potentially infected cattle remains.

"We know that infected material from infected animal brains with this disease can survive for long periods in the environment - years we're talking about here," he said. "There's really quite strong evidence that, at least some years ago, there was very poor procedural supervision at that mill [Thruxton]: infected remains of animals were left lying around and probably contaminated protein-carrying material is still lying around in large quantities in and under the soil on that site."

He added that potentially the soil could infect humans who came into contact with it through the mouth, eyes, nose and through the water supply.

Cheale Meats, the company which has owned Thruxton Mill since 1991, says it has invested £5m on transforming the rendering plant into one of the most sophisticated in the country.

The Mid Kent Water Company says its tests prove the water is safe. However, there is no proven test for BSE in water.

But David Richardson, plant manager at Thruxton Mill, admitted that "raw material" was put outside the plant before he arrived in 1994.

"It was outside when I first came here: there wasn't odour control, there was poor infrastructure, no proper effluent treatment, so therefore we were, from day one, fighting an historic battle."

Steam builds up on Channel link

Britain will be sidelined in Europe on "a rusty branch line from Brussels" if the high speed Channel Tunnel rail link is not built, a conference was told today.

Delegates from the public and private sectors gathered in Birmingham to launch the Fast Tracks to Europe Alliance, a group committed to ensuring the rail link stays on track.

National Planning Forum chairman Stewart Stacey told delegates: "If Britain is to be at the heart of Europe, it is neither acceptable that London is on a rusty branch from Brussels nor that our regions are beyond the buffer stops."

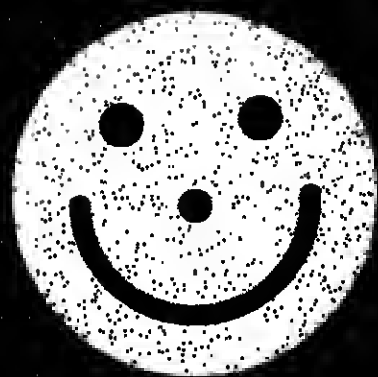
The group took action after it was revealed that London & Continental Railways was having difficulty fulfilling the contract to build the proposed £5.4bn route.

The Alliance believes the building of the link and new stations at Ebbsfleet in Kent, Stratford and St Pancras in London will be vital to businesses across the country. It also hopes to secure links from the Channel Tunnel to the West and East Coast Mainline.

The chairman of the Local Government Initiative, Cheshire councillor Derek Bateman, said the project had been mishandled from its inception.

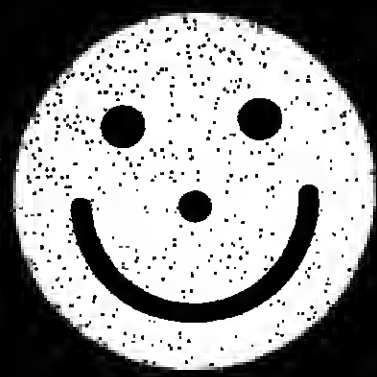
"Changes in route, changes in costs, changes in whether it's public or private sector, changes in the whole rail industry... the list goes on. I have every sympathy with John Prescott's current dilemma, given the situation he has inherited, and I can only wish John well in climbing out of a deep bomb crater hole, dug by others."

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ELECTROL

Chemicals, bugs and deadly toxins – the new

ANTHRAX

Symptoms: Fever, malaise, fatigue, cough and mild chest discomfort is followed by severe respiratory distress with dyspnea, diaphoresis, stridor and cyanosis. Shock and death occurs within 24 to 36 hours of severe symptoms.

History: Anthrax spores were weaponised by the US in the 1950s and 1960s before the programme was terminated. As recently as 1995 Iraq admitted to weaponising anthrax.

Treatment: It is usually not effective after symptoms are present, however the US Army medical management suggests high dose antibiotic treatment with penicillin, ciprofloxacin or doxycycline.

BUTOLINUM

Symptoms: Stomach pains, dizziness, diarrhoea, muscular weakness. The whole body including the muscles of the respiratory system become paralysed, leading to death by suffocation within days.

History: Several countries have admitted to weaponising botulinum toxins, including Iraq. In 1995 it was revealed that Iraq not only researched, but had filled and deployed more than 100 munitions with botulinum toxins.

Lethal dosage: The most lethal substance known to man. One teaspoon can kill 7 million people.

Treatment: A vaccine is available for those at high risk of exposure, but must be taken in advance. No known antidote after the symptoms appear.

Charles Arthur, Science Editor, on how to make the weapons, while Nicholas von Herberstein looks at their history and lethal effect

THE NEWS that you can buy anthrax by mail order may come as a shock to many, but a decade ago two experts in the field of chemical and biological weapons noted that in the United States, "marijuana is more closely regulated... than access to and distribution of most deadly biological cultures". And we all know how successful the "war on drugs" has been in the US.

Today, anthrax is still on sale: the American Type Culture Collection in Rockville, Maryland, offers four different kinds – shipped freeze-dried, and costing about \$140 (£88) for a sample. The ATCC describes its mission as "to acquire, authenticate, and maintain reference cultures, related biological materials, and associated data, and to distribute these to qualified scientists in government, industry, and education". Its catalogue contains thousands of samples of viruses, bacteria and other toxins.

However, as investigators have noted, persuading the ATCC that you are a suitably qualified scientist is "about as difficult as forging a prescription".

Considering that, and the fact that you can produce enough chlorine to kill at least one person (probably yourself) using items found under most household sinks, the question is: why do terrorists rarely choose to wage war using biological or chemical weapons?

The broad answer is that their toxicity makes them far



War ritual: Israeli dancers wearing plastic sheets and gas masks perform at a 'germ warfare' party in a Tel Aviv nightclub early yesterday. Photograph: AFP

more dangerous to manufacture and handle than a standard bomb. Few would have the confidence, or the training, of the members of the Red Army Faction, which in 1934 was discovered to be growing the bacterial botulinum toxin in a bathtub.

Intelligence experts reckon that proper growth and control of a bacterial toxin requires expertise not only in graduate-level microbiology, but also in pathology, aerosol physics and even meteorology, because not

only do you have to grow your bug in a bacterial brewery (costing some thousands of pounds), you also have to know how to distribute it without killing yourself first, and without it dying in the flask – deadly microbes are often surprisingly sensitive.

Toxins and organisms such as ricin, bubonic plague and anthrax probably pose more danger to the terrorist than the target. In addition, there's always an incubation period before the effect of any attack will be

seen, creating the problem of whether to claim responsibility early on (which might allow vaccination and precautions) or wait, and perhaps discover that your efforts are ignored.

By contrast, the dedicated mass-murderer might think that chemical weapons such as sarin and VX (both nerve agents) and mustard gas sound preferable. Both have clearly visible effects within minutes of exposure. But it's the manufacture and release which pose the major

hurdle. Although ballpoint-pen ink and insecticides are both, according to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, "only one chemical step away from sarin", it is a big step.

Producing nerve agents and other chemical weapons requires the manipulation of reagents such as hydrofluoric acid and organophosphates, and it's critical to get the temperatures and amounts correct, or you end up with a relatively harmless soup.

For all those reasons, only

the cultist terrorist groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Group and Aum Shinri Kyo, which attracted highly educated people, have opted for such means.

Of course, for Iraq, which has a number of very intelligent and well-trained scientists, such technologies are relatively easy to obtain and fund. But the uncertainty factor, such as the problem if the wind blows chemical weapons back into your own territory, generally forestalls their use.

SARIN

Symptoms: Runny nose, tightness of chest, dimming of visions, drooling, involuntary urination or defecation, twitching, jerking, convulsion, coma and loss of breath and death.

History: Sarin was first developed by Dr Gerhard Schrader in 1938, but mass produced by the US after the Second World War.

Treatment: Self-injection of Atropine or oxime into the thigh. Auto injectors are military only; not available to general public.

Lethal dosage: A small quantity splashed on the skin will produce enough vapours to exceed the lethal dosage (one teaspoon of sarin can kill 10,000 people).

VX

Symptoms: Runny nose, tightness of chest, dimming of visions, drooling, involuntary urination or defecation, twitching, jerking, convulsion, coma and finally cessation of breathing and death.

History: A technological improvement over the sarin gas, mass production of VX began in the United States in 1961.

Treatment: Self-injection of Atropine or oxime into the thigh. Though not available to general public, auto injectors are issued to all military forces as part of their NBC equipment.

Lethal dosage: Dermal VX is 300 times more toxic than sarin. The amount one can place on the head of a pin is sufficient to produce death in a human being.

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By Tim Cornwell in Los Angeles

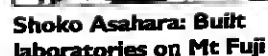
Test results were awaited yesterday to determine whether they had indeed been driving down the Las Vegas strip with an-

Harris has claimed to be testing a ray machine that kills toxic bacteria like anthrax and bubonic plague. Tests continued yesterday on the car the men were driving, which was isolated and wrapped in plastic.

With many questions still to be answered about the case, it was Harris' name that apparently triggered the massive response. Last year, he pleaded guilty to acquiring plague bacteria by mail order from a laboratory, but claimed his research for a book was aimed at preventing rather than causing biological terror. The FBI affidavit, however, said that last summer, he had spoken of his plans to unleash bubonic plague toxin in the New York subway.

**By Fran Abrams
and Andrew Marshall**

Of 819 long-range missiles imported by President Saddam in the 1980s, 817 had been accounted for. More than 500 had been used in the Iran-Iraq war, 93 in the Gulf War and 77 in training and testing. The rest had been destroyed, either unilaterally or under supervision by Unscm.



The story of Aum is in some ways illustrates the difficulties in the large-scale amateur manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. If the sarin attack owed much to the ingenuity of the Aum leader, Shoko Asahara, it also had a lot to do with the incompetence of the Japanese

On occasions Aum members attempted to disperse anthrax and botulism in Tokyo, but the anticipated decimation of the city never took place.

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Armada of doom lies in wait for Saddam

Emma Daly, on a US aircraft-carrier in the Gulf, watches preparations for war

THE flight-deck of an aircraft-carrier, 60ft above the sea, is an awe-inspiring place to be, an absurd triumph of planning over common sense. Who would have thought that 4.5 acres of non-slip surface could act as runway to dozens of jet fighters, screaming on and off at over 100mph, aided by steam-powered catapults and heavy cables?

The menace behind Kofi Annan's peace mission is embodied by the USS *George Washington* and USS *Independence*, the carriers leading 18 sister ships of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet through the jade waters of the Gulf. If Mr Annan's mission fails and the US decides to strike at Iraq, a deadly wave launched at sea will signal the start of Operation Desert Thunder.

The first-time visitor can only stand, slack-jawed, as the ship's company, wearing colour-coded "float coats", or life-jackets, load missiles, clean windscreens or signal pilots during the 100 sorties the 70-plus planes fly a day. Take-off involves pinning the aircraft's nose to the steel head of a catapult. Engines roar, steam pressure builds, then suddenly a pin snaps and the plane is rocketed down the runway and towards the water.

To save space, planes move around on deck with their wings folded back like flies or bent up at right-angles, allowing crew-

men to manoeuvre them into tiny spaces, wing-tips touching, for storage on the runway or in the hangar below.

It is impressive enough to stand on the flight-deck and feel the power of the aircraft launching; it is positively awe-inspiring to fly off the ship under catapult power, even in a COD, as the small transport planes that bring in mail and visitors are known, and which does 0 to 139mph in less than three seconds; an F-14 Tomcat fighter will reach 175mph by the time it leaves the 310ft runway. Passengers in a COD, who sit facing the tail and firmly strapped in by a harness, are ordered to grip the belts across the chest, brace their feet on the seat in front and lean forward for the "cat shot".

Adrenalin starts pumping (particularly around the quaking body of the nervous flyer) and then, with a rush and a whoop from the crew, you are flung back in your seat by an overwhelming force (about 8 to 10G) - but only for a couple of seconds. There is a sudden release and the plane is climbing, smoothly and calmly, away from the carrier. God only knows what it must feel like in a jet fighter.

"Recovery" is another arresting experience: the shortest, sharpest landing you could have without actually crashing. In-



Right stuff: Pilots kitting out on the aircraft-carrier USS *George Washington* for a sortie in F-14 fighters

Photograph: Reuters

coming pilots lower a straight bar with a shallow hook at the end and then aim for one of four steel cables stretched across the runway. The idea is to drop the wheels between wires three and four, so that the hook snags the third cable and drags the aircraft to a halt 300ft along the runway, which does not stretch the full quarter-mile length of the ship.

"You're basically trying to land in about a 10ft square area," said Lieutenant Greg

Harville, a COD pilot who flew us off the *George Washington*. "The first few times it is terrifying."

Cables are checked each day, and each one is changed after it has caught 100 planes.

If a cable were to break - and it has happened - it would whip back and kill anyone in the way. The sounds of a landing, or "trap", reverberate throughout the 17-deck ship, but anyone passing the engine-room where the arresting gear operates is

practically deafened by the screech as the cable rips out to catch 30 tons of jet fighter.

Of course, landing on the carrier doesn't just involve touching down. First you must survive the "carrier break", something aircrews explain to hapless civilians with some relish and which is supposed to slow the aircraft down. What this means is that, as you approach the ship flying low over the sea, the pilot yanks it to one side; the water appears at right

angles as you hang in your seat, heart in your mouth, before it levels off for landing.

The fighters come in at about 145mph; the other planes slow down to 95mph or so - still quite an emergency stop. And everyone comes in on full throttle, because if you miss the wire, the sea looms large and extremely close and you had better be able to take off at once, known as a bolter. Thankfully, we only watched the night flights - launch and recovery

continues as normal after dark.

Each carrier is loaded with 4,600,000lb of ammunition. The US armada in the Gulf carries 18,690 sailors and marines and 93 strike aircraft, along with planes that can listen to radar and radio and jam enemy signals. It includes the USS *Guam*, an amphibious assault ship carrying attack helicopters, and eight ships (including two submarines) that can fire Tomahawk cruise missiles, with a range of 1,000 miles.

Kuwait embassy set for exodus

THE United States on Tuesday offered dependants of its diplomats in Kuwait and Israel the chance to leave the region if they wish, a move which could further raise the level of alarm over Iraqi attacks with chemical arms. "It is official," a US embassy spokesman said.

A senior Western diplomat in Kuwait said: "Everybody has been watching for weeks what the Americans will do... This step might cause panic but it also depends on what other people (embassies) will do."

The "authorised departure" recommendation at State Department expense is currently being delivered to US diplomats in Kuwait and Israel, one diplomat said. The American families are not being ordered to leave but "if they want to leave they can leave and the government pays their way," one official in Washington said.

The recommendation to US officials "tells dependants they are allowed to leave if they choose," a US diplomat in Kuwait said. "The offer is effective immediately."

There are some 8,000 American civilians in Kuwait but the exact size of the US embassy staff was not immediately known. "We are not allowed to disclose this information but there are between 100 and 200 US diplomats and dependants in Kuwait," an embassy spokesman said. Several US embassy staff were seen on yesterday with their families in public in Kuwait. Diplomats in Kuwait said the much smaller German embassy there had already made a similar move while it, the Spanish and Swiss embassies were due to distribute gas masks to their citizens in Kuwait. Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and was expelled by a US-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf war. Reuters, Kuwait

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To participate in the offer you must collect 4 differently numbered tokens from the seven we will print between February 21 and February 27. These tokens will be redeemable at any of the Inter-Continental and Forum hotels listed in The Independent and Independent on Sunday. All prices shown are per room per weekend (couples for two nights) including full English breakfast and VAT. All bookings must be made using the Inter-Continental Central Reservation line. These special weekend rates for a minimum 2 night stay are available on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights from Friday 27 February until April 26 1998 (but include the Easter period as noted above). Rates are payable in local currency and do not include travel. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotion. All reservations are subject to availability.

The Independent and Independent on Sunday have joined forces with Inter-Continental Hotels to offer readers a unique 2 for 1 weekend promotion. Available at a selection of hotels in the UK and Europe, rates for these special weekends start from as little as £60 per room, per weekend and include breakfast for 2 each morning and all taxes and service charges. This fantastic 2 for 1 deal, which represents a 50% saving on the usual weekend rates, is available exclusively to Independent readers, and is on offer every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from now right through until the end of April 1998.

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Simply collect 4 out of the 7 tokens we will be printing every day until Friday 27th February. Choose the dates that you want to stay and telephone the Inter-Continental Central Reservation office on 0181 847 2277. Callers should quote 'The Independent Weekend Promotion' when making their booking. On your arrival at the hotel you should present your tokens in order to qualify. All bookings are subject to availability.

EASTER BONUS

As an extra bonus for Independent readers, these amazing weekend rates will be available throughout the Easter period at the London and Edinburgh hotels. The 2 for 1 deal (or 4 for 2 during Easter) will be on offer for a period of five nights, starting from Thursday 9th April right through to Monday 13th April inclusive.

Hotel Inter-Continental

London****
Located just off Park Lane, overlooking Hyde Park Corner and Buckingham Palace Gardens. With 458 elegantly decorated bedrooms and suites, a fabulous French Restaurant, informal coffee shop and modern health club and gym, the hotel boasts all the services and facilities you would expect from one of the capital's premier hotels. A brand new Club Inter-Continental executive floor is being launched in March.
Rate(per room per weekend) £189

Rate(per room per weekend) £195

Churchill Inter-Continental

London****
In Portman Square in the centre of the west End with the Oxford Street just two minutes walk. Recently renovated to the highest standards, the Churchill Inter-Continental boasts luxurious accommodation, a superb restaurant, Clementines and a new Churchill Bar & Cigar Driven. Guests have the use of a private tennis court just opposite the hotel.
Rate(per room per weekend) £189

The George Inter-Continental

Edinburgh
This first class hotel occupies a classic Georgian Building dating from the 18th century. In the heart of the city, its 195 bedrooms and suites enjoy superb views over the city and the Firth of Forth. Dining options include a choice of three restaurants and bars including the recently refurbished Carvers Restaurant, housed in one of the most spectacular dining halls in Edinburgh.
Rate(per room per weekend) £109

The Forum Hotel London

Perfectly situated close to the shopping area of Kensington and Knightsbridge. With 27 floors, many of the hotels 910 bedrooms and suites enjoy superb views over the London skyline. A wide choice of restaurants and bars include the Gloucester Road Deli with its authentic 'New York' atmosphere and the Kensington Garden Cafe.
Rate(per room per weekend) £129

The 2 for 1 deal is also available at Inter-Continental and Forum hotels in Brussels, Berlin and Budapest. Special weekend rates are also available to a selection of other Inter-Continental Hotels in Europe - Paris, Vienna, Rome, Cannes and Prague (prices on application).

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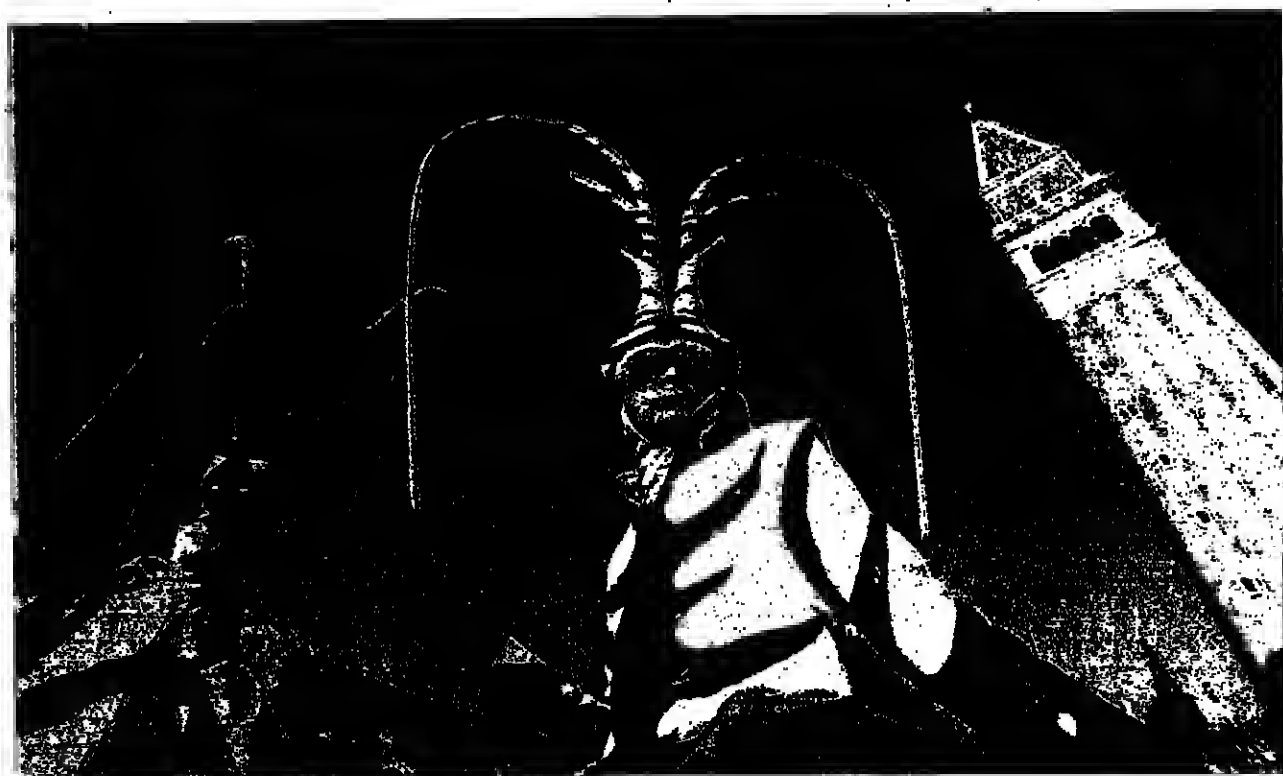
Venice is all dressed up for carnival time. But where is the party?



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
BRIAN
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Set pieces in St Mark's Square: Tourists gather at dusk to watch the carnival performers. Bottom, Mihail Chemialkin's newly unveiled statue of Casanova, who stopped by for coffee at Cafe Florian (below left) on his escape from jail



Casanova's day it was an excuse for wildness, says Andrew Gumbel. Now the tourists have taken over

THE PEACOCK couple made their assiduous by the waterfront outside the Doge's palace. With the glint of the morning sun on their saffron and periwinkle blue costumes, they gave each other a low stylised bow and stared intently into the beaky white masks hiding their faces. In the bawdy days of carnivals past, this might have been a lovers' tryst to crown a night of flirtatious debauchery. But in this modern-day Venice, it was something altogether less exciting. The peacock couple waited for a small crowd to gather around them, unfolded their arms to reveal gold-sequined interiors of their costumes (to "oohs" and applause as they did) and spent the next 10 minutes being photographed by Japanese tourists. It is hard to think of the Venice carnival these days as much more than a glorified photo opportunity. Granted, those meticulously tailored costumes – the ro-

bustly coloured harlequin suits and soft velvet doublets, the diabolical black-hooded capes and plunging multi-coloured ball gowns – look fantastic against the irresistible backdrop of the Piazza San Marco. It is remarkable that the designers and wearers of these outlandish outfits should spontaneously travel to Venice from the four corners of the world for the sheer pleasure of showing them off to the tourist groups and adult-education photography classes who have dutifully followed them into town.

But where are the parties that made carnival famous for the length of Venice's memorable decline in the 18th century? And where are the Venetians? By day, the carnival figures look like mannequins or stray theatrical extras, not the revellers they represent. By night, they are nowhere to be seen; for all but a handful of the festive 10 days the city slumps into its habitual



slumber shortly after the bars and restaurants close around 11 o'clock. Native Venetians make that sure they reach their souvenir shops and tourist

ing trade, but otherwise carnival appears to leave them thoroughly apathetic. Most of the old city's population are pensioners who cannot stand the idea of late-night noise; rather than encouraging the festi-

ties, they have recently been devoting their energies to closing one of Venice's few remaining rock venues.

When the Venice carnival was revived after a long hiatus in the late Seventies, the idea was to stage a proper festival, with music, poetry and plays oozing out of the city's theatres. But as the tourist numbers have swelled, all but one of the city's theatres have closed – or, as in the case of the Fenice opera house, burned down – leaving little by way of carnival venues.

The lone Teatro Goldoni is doing its best this year, putting on a crowded programme of events, including a play, a musical and concerts by Elvis Costello and David Byrne. Last night, Piazza San Marco hosted the inevitable masked ball, while tomorrow will see a parade of torchlit boats around the lagoon illuminated by fireworks.

These are isolated high spots, however. The event would seem strangely bloodless to the man providing the theme of this year's carnival, the pan-European bed-hopper and occasional spy Giacomo Casanova, who died exactly 200 years ago

and now has a statue to his name gracing the waterfront near the Bridge of Sighs.

In Casanova's day, carnival started in October and carried on until Lent. The masks and costumes broke down barriers of class and propriety and provided the perfect excuse for everyone, from noble ladies to footmen, to broaden the range and number of their sexual conquests.

Hair was piled outrageously high and necklines cut outrageously low; revellers would proceed from parades of wild animals, jugglers and rumbler to the theatre, and on to all-night sessions in gambling dens and whorehouses before appearing, dishevelled and exhausted, for the ritual morning parade of debauchees at the Rialto vegetable market.

Ah, those were the days. Venice is no longer a city of hedonistic decadence but rather a city of tourist scam artists and rip-off merchants who do not deserve the riches of their unique urban environment. Carnival can provide pretty colours, polite artistic events and the occasional high-profile concert. But if you are looking for a party, go to Rio.

Hills are alive to Trapp family's squabble

By Marcus Tanner

The family inspired the film *The Sound of Music*, but 60 years after they escaped the Nazi takeover of Austria, the von Trapps are no longer singing from the same hymn sheet.

Instead, the cosy clan celebrated on screen for its exemplary family values is involved in a most unharmonious struggle for control of the family business, an Austrian-style lodge at Stowe, in the hills of Vermont.

Lawyers representing two branches of the family appeared before the Vermont Supreme Court this week to argue whether one branch short-changed the other by \$3m. "It's sad," said Johannes von Trapp, youngest child of Maria von Trapp. "It wouldn't have happened while my mother was alive." The convent girl who Climbed Every Mountain when she was played by Julie Andrews died in 1987.

Tension blew up between the descendants of the entertainers from the Alps in 1993 after family members ousted Johannes von Trapp as president of the corporation running the Trapp family Lodge. He then regained control of the company the following year, after which his sister and some of his brother's



Discordant notes: The *Sound of Music* cast displaying a harmony absent currently among the von Trapp descendants

children objected and cashed in their shares, receiving \$2.5m from the business. However, they later challenged the payment in court, saying they were

due roughly twice as much and in May, a County Superior Court ordered Trapp Family Lodge Inc to pay the higher value, about \$3m.

Johannes von Trapp's lawyers have now appealed. But if the Supreme Court upholds the award, Johannes von Trapp says he may have to sell the lodge, which comes with restaurants and more than 2,000 acres.

The von Trapp family fled Austria in 1938, eventually set-

ling in the hills above Stowe. The first lodge burned down in 1980 but was rebuilt as a hotel with cottages and time-share units.

Drawn no doubt, by curiosity fuelled by the continuing popularity of the famous film, the lodge has about 150,000 visitors each year.

Monica's father attacks 'horrors'

By Mary Dejevsky
in Washington

The father of Monica Lewinsky, the former White House trainee alleged to have had a relationship with President Bill Clinton, has broken his silence with a bitter tirade against her treatment by the judicial authorities, comparing it to the McCarthy interrogations and the Inquisition.

Dr Bernard Lewinsky, a cancer specialist whose California home provided his daughter with brief respite from the Washington media circus two weeks ago, said he felt it was time to "speak up about the horrors that she has gone through and continues to go through".

In a television interview with ABC television's Barbara Walters, to be broadcast last night - but, like so much in this case, heavily leaked - Dr Lewinsky reserved special venom for Kenneth Starr, the independent prosecutor overseeing the case.

He should "lay off", he said. "I think he's totally out of control. My daughter has not done anything from the federal point of view. She's not a murderer. She's not a spy. There was an



Lewinsky: Father said she had endured 'horrors'

up a whole relationship with the President that didn't exist?", he replied. "I can't imagine her making that up."

Both Monica Lewinsky's parents, who divorced when she was in her teens, are now caught up in their daughter's problems. Her mother, Marcia Lewis - who shared her Washington flat and, it is said, personal confidences, with her daughter - spent three days last week giving evidence to the investigation and has still to complete her testimony.

She was allowed to leave the stand after suffering an emotional seizure.

Meanwhile, new leaks from tape-recorded conversations between Ms Lewinsky and her colleague Linda Tripp - the tapes that offered the first evidence of a relationship between Ms Lewinsky and the President - had Ms Lewinsky supposedly boasting of having "stolen" a timetable for one of Mr Clinton's foreign visits from the desk of her boss in the Pentagon.

This provoked an angry response from Ms Lewinsky's lawyer, William Ginsburg, who said selective leaking was damaging his client's case.

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Freetown emerges from the shadow of death

Life is returning to normal in the Sierra Leone capital, says Ed McLoughlin in Freetown

With its easy-going Creole culture and pleasantly seedy, balcony-lined streets, Freetown has long been known as the New Orleans of Africa. Now, following the flight of Major Johnny Paul Koroma and his street gang junta, it feels like New Orleans during Mardi Gras.

A week after the first Nigerian peace-keeping troops fought their way into the town centre something approaching normal life has returned to the chaotic streets of Sierra Leone's capital. Colourfully dressed women haggle on the pavements over cloths spread with lollipops, razor blades or rice, while a scattering of watchful pale faces marks the return of the first Lebanese traders after eight months in exile.

Only the unusually low number of cars and the occasional heat of burnt rubble testify to the nightmare which Freetown has lived since Koroma and his fellow junior officers seized power from elected President Ahmad Kabbah in May last year. The cars were mostly stolen early on, while the houses were burnt more recently, destroyed by vindictive junta fighters after the Nigerians began advancing on Freetown two weeks ago.

"They just went around attacking people and burning houses," said Henry Conteh, a Freetown businessman. "They said if the AFRC [Armed Forces Ruling Council] can't have Freetown then nobody's going to have Freetown."

Conteh was hitching near a Nigerian checkpoint on Main



A little boy in a soldier's helmet sitting at a Nigerian Ecomog checkpoint in Freetown this week as the city recovers from its occupation by rebels
Photograph: Popperfoto/Reuters

Motor Road: although once prosperous, he too lost his car to the junta fighters.

The general looting of vehicles had ruined his business selling spares. But, he admitted, he felt great. "I am so pleased this thing is over. For so long now we have lived in the valley of the shadow of death." One of the few remaining embassy officials in town put it another way: "People are so glad these days, you know what they are all saying? They are saying to each other happy new year. Happy new year and a Merry Christmas."

There have been bloodier regimes in Africa than Koroma's eight-month-old military junta, but few, if any, have touched it for naked cynicism and greed. Having ousted President Kabbah less than a year after his election, Koroma and his cohorts let it be known that, like an earlier junta of junior officers led by Captain Valentine Strasser, who all did well out of a palace coup in 1992, they felt entitled to enrich themselves for a while at the expense of their already-beggared country.

Sierra Leone's international

ally respected ambassador to the UN tried to negotiate with the junta shortly after the coup and emerged, dismayed, to tell journalists that the soldiers' main demand seemed to be a large sum of money - later reported to be £30m.

"And," he added, "they want 18 months in office to loot further. That is all they want to do. It is just shameful."

Even more shocking to many was the merger between Sierra Leone's army and the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) announced short-

ly after the coup. This confirmed what many ordinary people had long been alleging: that the bloody civil war which had killed over 20,000 people (nearly all civilians) since 1991 and displaced a third of the 4.5 million population had all along been conducted at the combatants' mutual convenience, to give both sets of gunmen an opportunity to pillage to their hearts' content.

"We saw them all going around Freetown, stealing and killing and raping women," said Abdul Bah, once a favourite

driver for visiting journalists, now bereft without his (sullen) car. "We saw that there was no difference between the RUF and the Sierra Leone army. The only thing was that amongst themselves the RUF maybe had more discipline."

Nigeria's supposedly spontaneous liberation of the embargoed city, officially sparked off by a minor clash at the nearby air-strip of Hastings two weeks ago, was met by cheering crowds. A week later groups of children are still cheering at passing military convoys.

The main route of advance from the Nigerian enclave at Hastings shows signs of only the lightest combat. Colonel Maxwell Khohe, commander of the Freetown brigade of Ecomog, a Nigerian-dominated multinational West African peace-keeping force in Liberia and Sierra Leone, said that the RUF and Sierra Leone Army had proved unwilling to resist organised opposition.

"The rebels didn't fight even when they were better armed and in better bunkers," he told *The Independent* yesterday. "We

are now moving to clear them out of the countryside."

Despite reports of renewed rebel raids in the central regions around Bo and Kenema the Nigerians say they can finish "mopping up" soon. Several senior junta leaders have already fallen into Ecomog hands and are being held in Freetown until President Kabbah returns to office, possibly some time next week. Koroma himself remains at large, however. According to Colonel Khohe, he was last heard of on Thursday when he unsuccessfully tried to fly from a northern air-strip into neighbouring Liberia.

At least 200 people are believed to have died in the fighting in Freetown alone, although some of these were junta fighters or sympathisers caught and lynched by townspeople. Several hundred more surrendered or were captured.

For the Nigerian officers involved in planning and executing "Operation Sand Storm" last week the public welcome must have come as a pleasant change. Feared and disliked at home as agents of General Sani Abacha's repressive military government, Nigeria's soldiers are banned from travelling in most Western countries, including Britain. The November 1995 execution of disident writer Ken Saro-Wiwa shocked the international community into imposing limited sanctions against Nigeria.

But the people of Freetown, delighted to be rid of Koroma and his gun-toting thugs, are not inclined to look too hard at their liberators' credentials.

£10 Conran lunch

THE INDEPENDENT

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

The Independent and Independent on Sunday in association with Terence Conran are delighted to offer readers the opportunity to enjoy lunch or early evening supper at six of London's top restaurants throughout January and February for £10

The Independent offer is available at the following restaurants:

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0171 559 4000
Lunch 12noon - 3pm, early evening supper 6pm - 7pm

Blue-Print Café The Design Museum, 28 Shad Thames, London, SE1 2YE
0171 378 7031
Lunch 12noon - 3pm, early evening supper 6pm - 7pm

Le Port de la Tour Bar & Grill 36d Shad Thames, London, SE1 2YE
0171 403 9403
Lunch 12noon - 3pm, early evening supper 6pm - 7pm

Mezzo 100 Wardour Street, London, W1V 3LE
0171 314 4000
Lunch 12noon - 3pm, early evening supper 6pm - 7pm
closed Saturday lunchtime, open Sunday 12pm - 4pm

Quaglino's 16 Bury Street, St James's, London, SW1Y 6AL
0171 930 6767
Lunch 12noon - 3pm, early evening supper 5.30pm - 6.30pm

Zinc Bar & Grill 21 Heddon Street, London, W1R 7LF
0171 255 8899
The special 3 course menu is available between 12noon and 7pm
between Monday and Wednesday the offer is extended until 11pm

The offer is available 7 days a week at all six restaurants
* Closed from 1pm on Sunday Offer not available after 6pm on February 14



Bluebird

THE INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT

Valid between Saturday February 21st and Friday February 27th

Name _____

Address _____

This voucher entitles the holder and all members of their booking to participate in The Independent/Conran Restaurants £10 lunch offer

From Monday January 5th until Saturday February 28th, the following establishments are offering readers a two course lunch or early evening supper for just £10 per person.

How to Book

To participate in the offer simply collect one token (tokens will be printed every day until Saturday February 28th) and then telephone the restaurant of your choice quoting yourself as an Independent diner. On your arrival at the restaurant you should present your token in order to qualify for the offer. Each token is valid for a complete table booking. The tokens will be valid for one week only, and will be dated accordingly. To continue to participate in the offer, simply collect a token from the week in which you wish to dine. Pre-booking is essential and all bookings are subject to availability.

A special discount is available on selected items in the Bluebird and Le Port de la Tour shops on presentation of the token.

Something to chew over during your Independent lunch: £20,020 buys a Sharan SE and all the trimmings.

Power steering, ABS, air conditioning, twin airbags, 180° rotating front seats, front and rear electric windows, remote central locking, ultra-sonic olorn, multi-functional computer and more besides come as standard fare for that 'on the road' price.

Surprisingly ordinary prices



A new breed of Nineties women is turning away from marriage and children in favour of success at work. Clare Garner finds out why

Single for sake of their careers

A growing band of Nineties women is electing to be single, forsaking all others in favour of their careers. They are thirty somethings, spouse-free and childless, who enjoy their own company and have absorbing careers and strong friendships. They are sceptical about love, and *Harpers & Queen* calls them the "Lone Rangers." But might there be unforeseen consequences to this new-found freedom?

Dr Catherine Hakim, a sociologist at the London School of Economics, describes them as: "incremental decision makers", women who are constantly reconsidering their options and making their career the priority for another year. "They are constantly postponing, which after a certain passage of time becomes a permanent postponing," she says.

Just how much successful high-flying Nineties women are prepared to sacrifice was made apparent recently by Rebekah Wade when she was appointed deputy editor of the *Sun* newspaper at 29. "I think I need to be single [for the job]," she said, on taking up her post. Not so long before that she had called off her engagement to *EastEnders* actor Ross Kemp. Now she has married her job. Would Piers Morgan, who was made a Murdoch editor at a similarly young age, have made the same decision?

A similar trend in the television industry was highlighted by a 1994 survey of industry executives which found that 70 per cent of women in their thirties were childless, compared with 34 per cent of their male colleagues.

Ms Wade and her media colleagues are typical of a particular generation – the 20 per cent of women born since the 1960s who are expected to choose to remain childless. This is predicted to rise to 30 per cent by 2010. "In Britain childlessness is highest among women who have most to gain from their careers. They have professional, managerial jobs which offer promotions and interesting work. It's not just the great pay," says Dr Hakim.

But when they reach the top of their ladder, by which time it may be too late to rethink their choices, how will they feel? If lucky they will think like Lisa Gernon, 38, chief executive of Cable and Wireless Mobile, who says: "I opted out of the family life and have never regretted it."

Others believe that a career and relationships are incompatible. Nicola Foulston, 27, last year's *Veuve Cliquot* Businesswoman of the Year, admits that her regular 70-hour weeks were one key reason her marriage did not last longer. "I tried to find a compromise between my marriage and my business life, but it didn't work out."

Annabel Heseltine, 34, journalist and daughter of Michael Heseltine, the former deputy prime minister, is writing a book about thirtysomething single women – of which she is one. Ms Heseltine lives alone in a flat she owns, like an increasing number of women today.

At 24, Ms Heseltine announced she wanted to travel. "My mother said: 'Darling, don't you want to get married?' I said: 'Well, yes, but I don't want to hang around and wait for it.' It was a very clear decision and that's the philosophy I've followed throughout my life." Ten years on, she is still single.

She notices how women, herself included, become more picky as about a partner as they get older. "You look at them a lot more closely," she said. "You're not mucking around anymore. You're not 22-years-old, saying: 'Isn't it fun.' You are not choosing to be single, but you are choosing to be choosy."

According to Angela Giveon, managing editor of *Executive Woman* magazine: "A lot of women are making the choice to be single because they realise they can't have it all," said Ms Giveon. "They've usually had a failed relationship – not necessarily marriage – when they make this decision. Something is thrown at them like: 'You think of your job more than me,' and they think like a man: 'So it, it's not worth the bother.'"

But Ms Heseltine remains confused by the apparent priorities of thirtysomething women. She suspects that they are not "really happy". "There are a lot of women in their thirties who seem to be quite happy about throwing away their chance to reproduce, which is phenomenal. There's the selfish gene; is this the selfish generation? ... The reality is that we're put onto this Earth for one reason only and that is to have children. But to deny such a fundamental urge, I don't buy it."

So, we fight for the freedom, but do we really want it? To Ms Heseltine all that choice turns into a burden. "For a lot of women a career justifies them being single. You've had this choice. You want to do these different things. You find yourself single and it's because you have a career."

She believes that, in reality, most of her peers will be married by 40. "It's just taking them a long time to work it out. They are doing the questioning which a previous generation would have done when their children had grown up before they are even married."

But even when the right man does come along, it is not all done and dusted. "You don't want to have your back

against the wall in your mid-forties. In reality, it is six months to a year before you're married. Do you really want to get pregnant the second you are married? Then you need time to try. So you're talking three years. It could all go wrong. The relationship could break up; you may not be able to have children that easily."

Cristina Odone, 37, author and television critic, would like to have children, but does not regret for a minute the choices she has made to date. Unlike Ms Heseltine, she regards careers as assisting women in fulfilling themselves. "I know I would be just as unhappy were I to jettison my writing as to wake up one day and

realise I missed the boat as regards childbirth," she says.

However, one incident – "a real eye-opener" – has stuck in Ms Odone's mind. "I went for professional advice to a woman who is a literary lioness," she recalls. "I was writing my first novel. She just looked at me and said: 'Just make sure that you don't pass up the chance of having a child. It's my one regret.' It was incredibly poignant and it really did alarm me."

"Some of the most interesting and accomplished women of my age who have foregone the baby option have all regretted it, without one exception. Really, really famous household names. They are all

self-styled feminists, self-styled career women, and are all hailed as success stories. Yet they've all said in private: 'There's one thing I regret...'

Between the age of 30 and 34, Ms Odone edited the *Catholic Herald* newspaper; she made a conscious decision not to settle down and have children at that time. "I was so wrapped up in work. I would have either resented the child or cheated on the work. I didn't want to do either. I don't regret that because I still feel I could have children. It's too early to regret. Now I think I could definitely balance work, which is writing at home, with a child. But hey, where's the husband?"



Cristina Odone and Annabel Heseltine say not having children is not an option

Photograph: Emma Boam

They're just men behaving successfully

The vast majority of successful men in their 30s or older are married. That doesn't mean they don't envy an ambitious colleague who, unencumbered by wife and children, can devote himself to his career 16 hours a day or more. Highly successful single men don't have to rush home to spend "quality time" with their families.

There was a time when any single man who wanted to succeed in business, politics, showbusiness or even sport was severely handicapped until he found a wife. This was because of the fear of being considered homosexual. Even if you were truly a "confirmed bachelor", it certainly wasn't acceptable in many corporate cultures where climbing the ladder depended on your conforming to an explicit middle-class social stereotype that included a wife (who didn't work), two kids, a house in the suburbs, a dog and a cat.

As society has changed its attitude towards homosexuality and as single women have flooded the workforce, it has become increasingly acceptable for a man to forgo a family in order to concentrate entirely on his career.

While today most men still choose the comforts and support of a traditional monogamous relationship (in 1998, this can include a monogamous homosexual relationship), far fewer men get married in their early or mid-twenties than was the case 50 years ago. It's not simply wanting to enjoy their bachelor freedom longer, or Generation X's so-called "fear of commitment", but a rational desire to establish a firm economic foundation before taking on a life partner and embarking on parenthood.

Moreover, what young media executive doesn't envy, for example, Andrew Neil's freedom to pursue a career that includes being editor-in-chief of four Barclay Brothers' publications (the *Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday*, the *European* and *Sunday Business*), a chat show host on both the BBC and ITV, director of Mohamed Al Fayed's Liberty Publishing group (*Punch*, *Liberty Radio*) and a contributing editor of *Vanity Fair* – all this plus nights in Tramp in the company of various pretty young women.

Other highly successful single men today include:

John Browne – chief executive of BP; Michael Dobson – chairman of Morgan Grenfell; Peter Mandelson – Minister without Portfolio; Gordon Brown – Chancellor of the Exchequer; Michael Bloomberg – financial information tycoon; Geoffrey Boycott – cricketer; Dicky Bird – cricket umpire; David Geffen – Hollywood mogul; partner at Dreamworks.



Singular success: David Geffen

A little of a good thing can be wonderful. Can't it?

Nobody knows if wine is bad for you, it seems. That's just as well because we're drinking more of it than ever. Kate Watson-Smyth sips the facts

IT'S SATURDAY – the morning after the night before. So how much did you drink last night? A couple of glasses of wine in the interests of preventing heart disease, or more than half a bottle which, if you are a woman, dramatically increases the risk of cancer. Or were you so confused by the conflicting messages that you drank several bottles to help you forget about the whole thing?

Research published this week purports to show that two or three glasses of wine a day can significantly reduce the risk of cancer. Strange that. A similar study put out earlier in the week carried the message that women who drink between two and five glasses a day will increase the risk of breast cancer.

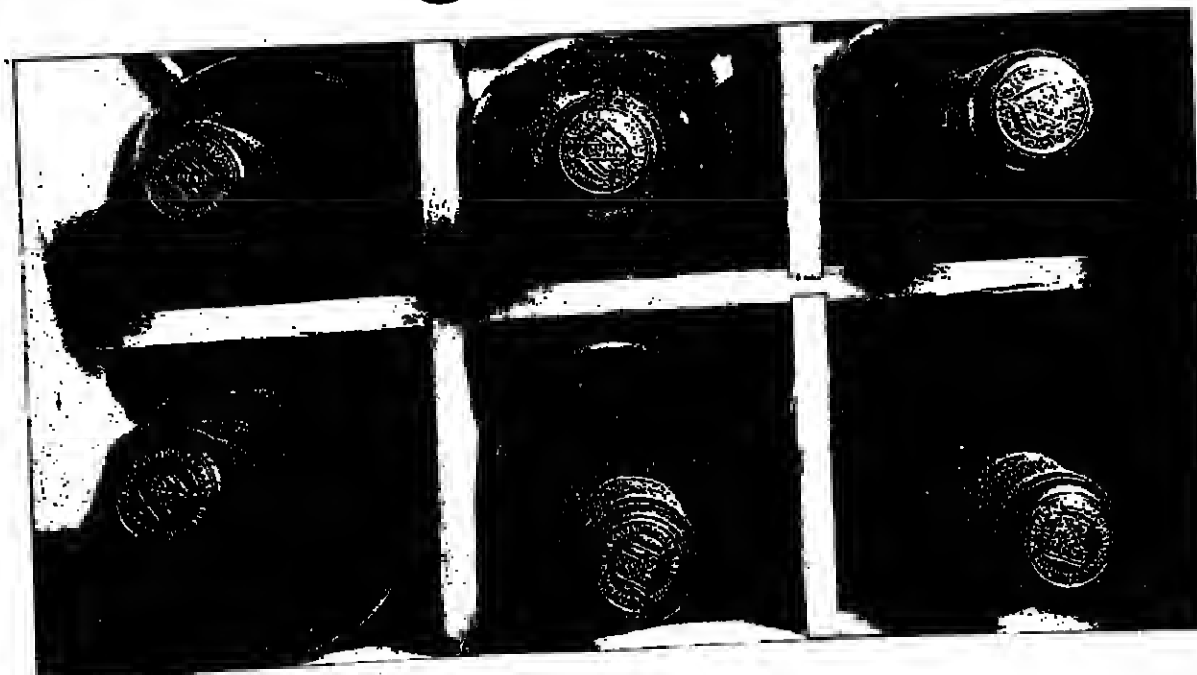
It doesn't take a scientist to deduce that the advice has never been more contradictory, but despite that, the British are

in the throes of a passionate love affair with the grape. In the past 30 years, wine consumption has soared by more than 450 per cent, while it has only doubled in America and has (believe it or not) fallen by half in France.

One reason, say vintners, is that Britain does not have its own wine culture and that other wine-producing countries have seized the opportunity to create a new market.

Alex Ignatieff, wine buyer at Harvey Nichols, goes so far as to say that Britain has become the wine capital of the world. "The main reason for this is the emergence of New World wines, which have been aggressively marketed in this country."

"Wine sellers in places like Uruguay were faced with two choices – either to try and persuade the great aunt to give up her pink gin in favour of wine,



or to try and create a new market. They went for the latter and have made a market out of nothing. There is a much greater choice of wine in this country than anywhere else in the world because we do not have a mature wine industry and so the market has exploded."

Further testament to our growing taste for wine is tak-

ing shape beneath the Cannon Street railway viaduct on the south bank of the Thames. By this time next year, the vast expanse of vaulted arches will be transformed into Vinopolis, a "City of Wine", no less.

The focal point of Vinopolis will be an "interactive" tour through 20 themed pavilions covering the main wine pro-

ducing regions of the world. A trip round the Italian section, for example, will allow visitors to take simulated tours of Italy's wine country while sitting on a Vespa.

Tony Hodges, director of Vineworld, who came up with the plan for Vinopolis and leased the 100,000-sq-ft space from Railtrack, says one rea-

son that wine has become so popular is that people are better educated and more widely travelled.

"Historically, wine was an aspirational drink for the gentry and the City but because of its availability in supermarkets, everyone drinks it now," he says. "People travel more and they want to try the wines

that they have seen abroad." The retailers have been quick to cash in on the growing taste for wine. Specialist off-licences, Victoria Wine and Thresher for example, each have around 1,500 stores across the country. But the real story has been the rise of the supermarkets.

Safeway, which stocks more than 500 wines, says that at the moment seven out of every 10 bottles are sold in a supermarket, compared with fewer than four just a decade ago. According to a spokeswoman for the store: "Palates are becoming much more sophisticated and drinking as an everyday habit has become much more acceptable."

But what are we to make of the health risks, particularly for those who are indulging in a glass or three every day?

Caroline Stacey, the food editor of *Time Out* magazine, says she distrusts much of the research. "It seems to me that scientists come out with a different message every day and you never quite know how reliable their studies are. I really don't think people should take that much notice. I drank wine in moderation all through

my pregnancy and I think that science is just used as a way of justifying puritanism."

Jason Rabinowitz, a research manager at the Design Council and lover of fine wines, is similarly dismissive of the health warnings. "If I read something that says wine is good for me then I will take notice of that but if I see an article saying it's bad then I tend to ignore it," he says.

Sir Richard Doll, a leading consultant at the Cancer Studies Unit for the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and Britain's most famous medical researcher, has concluded that alcohol in moderation is good for you. "I can see no reason whatsoever for thinking that wine drinking would reduce the risk of cancer," he says.

"The benefit of alcohol is in the prevention of heart disease, but that is only for those over the age of 45. However, it is quite clear that there is an all-over benefit in moderate consumption and two drinks a day are good for you."

So with that cheerful thought in mind, perhaps it's time to nip down to the pub for a lunch-time glass – strictly medicinal of course.

Not a dry eye in the house?

For his new 'Butterfly', David Freeman has flooded the Albert Hall but failed to tap the wellsprings of emotion. Edward Seckerson could have wept at the waste.

Water, water, everywhere... The advance publicity promised it, and Raymond Gubbay duly delivered it - all 15,000 gallons of it - to the Royal Albert Hall arena. There hasn't been this much fuss about flooding in the capital since before the advent of the Thames barrier. But there it was, pretty as a picture postcard, a package holiday brochure, the way the West will always see it, the way Lieutenant BF Pinkerton saw it - one small corner of the "floating island" that is for ever Uncle Sam. Director David Freeman and his designer David Roger have plucked their *Madam Butterfly* straight from the Hollywood backlot. It has the look, the feel, the rosy glow of a studio set from the days when Technicolor was still a novelty. You half expect the spirit of Esther Williams to surface from amidst the ornamental rocks and walkways and smile benevolently upon the whole enterprise.

But that, presumably, was the point: to isolate, to maroon *Butterfly* somewhere between her own culture and the West's perception of it. So the detail is lovingly precise, the kimonos enchanting, the blossom fresh every day. But we're closer to Gilbert & Sullivan's *Titipu* than to real-life Nagasaki. So this is a sham, an illusion, a fantasy - like Pinkerton's love for *Butterfly*. So David Freeman has something devastating up his sleeve for Act 2? Or not.

Returning after the interval, a time-lapse of three long years during which time *Butterfly*'s hopes and finances have begun to dry up, we discover that - surprise, surprise - the water has, too. The water garden has become a Zen Buddhist stone garden, its austerity - or so the programme note insists - a stern reminder of the religion which *Butterfly* abandoned but which will now reclaim her. A stern reminder? But nothing else has changed. *Butterfly*'s little house is still pretty as a picture, still festooned in fresh blossom, still bathed in that rosy glow (courtesy of lighting designer Andrew Bridge).

To Sunday 1 March, Royal Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, London SW7. Booking: 0171-589 8212



More Titipu than Nagasaki: Liping Zhang as Butterfly, Craig Downes as Pinkerton Photograph: Laurie Lewis

THE WEEK ON RADIO ROBERT HANKS

It's a well-known factoid (looks like a fact, smells like a fact, isn't true) that people are resistant to change - a line wheeled out regularly by the BBC when announcing schedule changes. Of course, if resistance to change were so firmly rooted in human nature, then we'd still be hanging around the Olduvai Gorge sneering at this trendy stone-tool rubbish and pining for the good old days, when people lived in trees and kids showed some respect.

But if small-c conservatism isn't necessarily part of the human condition, it may well be part of our condition, here and now. It could be a global change, a reaction to the century that invented the phrase "I can remember when it was all trees round here"; or perhaps it's a purely local phenomenon, a reaction not to change pure and simple, but to injudicious, cocked-up change.

At any rate, this is the lesson you could draw from two programmes on Radio 4 this week. In *Why Did We Do That?* on Thursday, Chris Bowlby investigated the mania for urban motorways that laid waste so many towns and cities in the Sixties and Seventies; and on Friday morning the architect Maxwell Hutchinson began a six-part series, *Back to the Drawing Board*, on the impact his profession has had on Britain over the past 50 years.

One thing both programmes made clear was that change was welcomed enthusiastically by many people - bus companies ran tourist trips to admire the Presto by-pass. And the demolition of slums in favour of clean, modern council estates was not

would behave over time, or how people would react to new living arrangements, such as high-rise blocks. Bowlby's diagnosis of the trouble with road-building was less sympathetic, perhaps because it isn't his profession, perhaps because town-planners had fewer excuses. Certainly it's hard to see the counter-balancing realism in Birmingham's dream that "tree-lined parkways" would help transform it into one of Europe's most beautiful cities. Luckily, the wave of urban road-building broke against London, the planners admitting defeat when computer projec-

tions of traffic flow suggested that Earls Court be replaced by a 14-lane motorway. These sharply argued, well-made programmes offered nicely contrasted views of closely related subjects. This was probably mere accident, though, and could easily have been another example of the BBC failing to find new ideas, or remember the old ones. This week had a good example: a Radio 3 series on spaw-towns called *Talking the Waters*, admirably complementing last year's Radio 2 feature on the same subject with the same title. And you thought the BBC was interested in novelty for its own sake.

Yes we have no arts policy

A WEEK IN THE ARTS DAVID LISTER

One of the most significant events in the arts this week went completely unpublicised, unreported and unheard. Actually, that's not quite fair. A room full of people did hear this talk on the future of arts policy in England; but they heard it in Scotland, where it will not apply, so they don't fully count.

The talk was given by Graham Devlin, his inaugural lecture as honorary professor of the Scottish Centre for Cultural Policy and Management at Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh. Mr Devlin is deputy general secretary of the Arts Council of England, and for nearly a year has been acting secretary general - in other words, running the show. So his words repay some study. I was, of course, happy to hear him using some of his inaugural lecture to endorse *The Independent's* campaign for tax breaks for people who give to the arts. Let's hope that Edinburgh University alumnus Gordon Brown pays attention to honorary professors in the city.

I also enjoyed the diversion of his reminiscences about the Arts Council's more controversial funding decisions. Who would want to forget the legendary two men walking round East Anglia with poles on their heads (funded by the Experimental Projects Committee)? Who would want to remember Throbbing Gristle's exhibition of Miss Cosie Fanny Tutti's soiled underwear at the ICA?

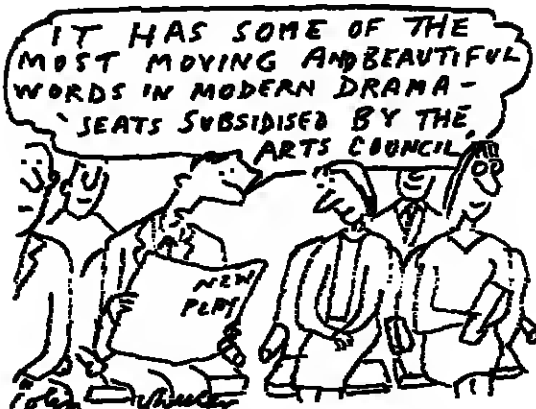
particular interest for his thoughts on the future of the Arts Council. They were, he stressed, personal thoughts, he was there in a personal capacity and nothing he said should be taken as official policy. And he would say that, wouldn't he? Me, I disclaim all

down and should give more thought to funding individuals as well as companies and buildings. And about time too. The premise that we cannot fund individuals has led to some ludicrous anomalies over the years. We managed to lose a talent like the director

the wider cultural industries and the commercial sector; it should also stand up as a powerful advocate for the arts.

Well, one could argue that it should have been doing most of this already. But let's not be picky. This future role as a policy body, with the regions distributing funds locally, makes some sense, and might save the Council from abolition by an increasingly sceptical government. The successes of *Adventures in Motion Pictures* and others in the West End show that the subsidised and commercial sectors are closely linked. And the public never differentiates between them anyway. A national cultural strategy should embrace both.

Most pleasing was a sentence in Devlin's speech which said that the Council should put subsidy into seat-pricing structures which "make the arts affordable for the majority of people, and not just a well-heeled elite". At last, a glimmer of recognition that price determines access, and that the best thing a subsidy body can do is to bring down ticket prices. The effect could not be better illustrated than by the sell-out success of Raymond Gubbay's cut-price but stunning *Madam Butterfly* now playing at the Royal Albert Hall (and reviewed above). Bringing ticket prices down, making transport to arts events safer and more efficient: these are things rarely discussed by funding bodies. But they are crucial to bringing in more punters.



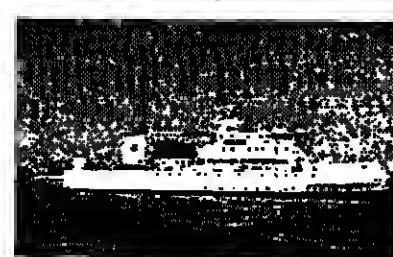
such disclaimers. I'm content to believe that the man who has administered the Arts Council for the past year, and actually continues to do so for another month, is projecting more than a few personal whims. What we got in that Edinburgh lecture theatre was a snapshot of how the arts will be run in the future.

The new Council, says Mr Devlin, should be slimmed down and should give more thought to funding individuals as well as companies and buildings. And about time too. The premise that we cannot fund individuals has led to some ludicrous anomalies over the years. We managed to lose a talent like the director

ISLANDS ON THE EDGE



A Nine Day Exploration of the Northern Isles & the Hebrides Aboard the 'Professor Multanovsky' 7th to 15th June 1998 15th to 23rd June 1998*



THE ITINERARY

We expect to explore and land on a number of remote islands, taking advantage of weather conditions to use our time to maximum effect. We hope to achieve the following: Aberdeen. Embark 'Prof. Multanovsky' in the afternoon and sail. The expedition leader will introduce the team and outline the voyage plans. Copinsay. To the east of Orkney and Scapa Flow are the tiny islands of Copinsay, cruise the mile-long cliffs with their spectacular birdlife. Fair Isle. Laying claim to be the most isolated inhabited isle in the UK. Here we can stretch our legs on an island walk, perhaps visiting the Bird Observatory and searching out the puffin slopes. The tiny population of 50 or so islanders always extend a warm welcome. Mousa. South of Lerwick is the

uninhabited island of Mousa. Hopefully, we should see basking common and grey seals and otters. Here we will also see one of the best examples of a Broch (fortified farm).

Foula. South west of Shetland lies Foula, home to thousands of aulks, guillemots, puffins and kittiwakes, breeding on a breathtakingly high cliff, known as the Noup. In the island's ponds we will look for red-necked phalaropes and red-throated divers. The colonies of Arctic skuas and great skuas are amongst the largest in the North Atlantic.

North Rona. Our first landfall in the Hebrides will be the lovely, lonely island of North Rona. Here we may find leach's perils nesting and nearby colonies of great black-backed gulls, great skuas and puffins. This is also a breeding ground for grey seals. In the evening we circumnavigate Sula Sgeir with its thousands of gannets.

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* Sales in reverse order from Oban to Aberdeen

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Mmm, what's up, Doc? What is up, you long-haired pyjama sack, is that some of us Europeans have had enough of your homogenised American culture infiltrating our precious heritage and want to put a stop to it. As we report today, the Netherlands government wants to impose a quota on concerts, reserving 7 per cent of performing time for the work of Dutch composers.

This is only the latest instance in a long tradition of cultural protectionism, much of which is primarily a reaction against American dominance. Cultural protectionism is particularly strong in Canada, a country with a national psyche largely defined by its relationship with its massive, and massively vulgar, neighbour. It has controls on magazine publishing and quotas for popular music on the radio as well as pop videos on television. The purpose is not explicitly to build a dyke against a tide of American pop, but to foster "world-beating talent" of Canada's own. As if Neil Young and the Cowboy Junkies needed subsidy to succeed (and ask not who the Cowboy Junkies might be: Sir Jeremiah Harman, the "out-of-touch judge", has just been sacked for less).

On the other side of the Atlantic, France has been the most enthusiastic builder of ramparts to preserve its own cul-

tural purity. It was France which led the failed initiative to require half of all television broadcasting in the European Union to be European-made. It was France which took the global free-trade negotiations, Gatt, to the brink because it insisted on—and eventually obtained—special treatment for its film and television industries.

And it is France which is now leading the charge against the attempt to liberalise cross-border investment in the 29 rich countries in the OECD club. Earlier this week, French film-makers demonstrated in Paris in support of the minister of culture, who is resisting a ban on discrimination against foreign investors. This would outlaw French attempts to protect their own film industry, and amounts to an American attack on French "cultural identity", according to Jean-Jacques Beineix, director of *Betty Blue*.

It is easy for us to sneer at French defensiveness. We like to think *Franglais* is funny, and to adopt an air of superiority about the ability of English to absorb words from French—and many other languages. But we speak a dialect of American, after all, and can share much more easily both in Disney fantasy and in Hollywood drama without being constantly aware that it is foreign. Despite our knee-jerk anti-



Americanism, we consume American culture avidly, and our lives have been greatly enriched by it. Continental Europeans are mocked by history, too, in that the creative spark of the Californian film industry was exported from Europe, largely by Russian Jewish émigrés.

But language, the substructure of

culture, is a sensitive subject. French, once the *lingua franca* of an empire, now cringes before the global pervasiveness of polyglot English. The Dutch—the very name by which they are known to us marginalises them as an adjunct of the Deutschen—speak a frail and pasteurised compromise between English and German, in both of which they are often also fluent.

The United Kingdom has long accepted that special measures of legal protection and taxpayer subsidy are justified for a language such as Welsh. But it is a long step from preserving and promoting a language to drawing up quotas for cultural products. And this is where we must take issue with the Dutch government's decree.

However much our knees might jerk in sympathy with the protection of national cultural autonomy, this kind of crude quota must be rejected. It is as doomed in the cultural sphere as it is in the international trading of widgets. Cultural quotas open the authorities to ridicule and their effects will be counter-productive. Already opponents claim that the fact that composers can be considered "Dutch" if they have made a "long-term and significant contribution to Dutch music" could let in Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler. Getting around the 3 per cent

quota reserved for living Dutch composers—those who have not yet popped their clogs—is a tougher assignment. Theo Verbey is the name cited by the Dutch Composers' Society in defence of the quota system: newcomers like him "need the opportunity to have their work heard". Perhaps, but do concert-goers need the opportunity to be forced to hear it? Such a requirement would lead to riots in the stalls in this country, being interpreted as an edict for the compulsory playing of Harrison Birtwistle.

Quotas are bound to be abused. Apparently Marcel Poot, a Belgian composer, owes his fame to the fact that he once composed a piece which is just five minutes long—popular with Belgian orchestras entitled to extra state funding if they play a Belgian composition on foreign tours.

We are not opposed to official support for all forms of art and culture—on the contrary, we are campaigning for the Government to do more. But we are against this kind of Protectionism. In a free society with (despite some imperfections in the markets for newspapers and satellite television) free media, people should be allowed to see, hear and buy whatever art turns them on, wherever it comes from.

LETTERS

Childcare tax breaks

THE Government makes much of its commitment to a national childcare strategy, but I fail to see how any system implemented can be fair and workable until it is focused on every working mother in this country, rather than just on those who are most needy or at the lowest end of the pay scale.

Labour's efforts to improve childcare provision as part of its New Deal programme are commendable. But the majority of mothers with children are not claiming benefit. Many millions of us have paid into the tax and benefits system for years, only to find that as soon as we decide to start a family, the doors of state support are closed to us.

How can a system which willingly taxes women when they are childless and commitment-free, but which refuses to give them anything in return when they are most in need of support, be a just one?

If this government is to retain the crucial support of female voters, it must look at ways of recognising the vast economic contribution made by working mothers, and examine workable incentives to those who wish to return to work after childbirth and continue contributing to the Treasury through the tax system. *The Independent's* suggestion of an £1,800 tax credit is an excellent start.

LJ WRIGHT
London N22

I AM delighted to see you have started a campaign to help working mothers like myself. I work as a researcher for an MP, and although I love my job, it is actually costing me money to work. Because I work long hours and my son is not yet at school, childcare absorbs all my after-tax income. A small amount of Family Credit is left to cover all my other living costs. There are many people working in Parliament, who aren't MPs, who are likely to need workplace childcare (report, 19 February), and subsidised childcare at that. There are surveys sent out once in a while to try and determine the demand for a nursery in Parliament. So far they have demonstrated that there is not enough demand to justify a nursery. But surely that's because parents who would need it are not here to be surveyed—because they have difficulty arranging or affording childcare.

EMMA THORPE
Thames Ditton, Surrey

FAR from the sinister motives implied in not returning a call from Fran Abrams to comment on a campaign for childcare in the House of Commons ("No room for children in the house", 19 February), may I say that I both support the campaign and returned her call.

I believe that affordable quality childcare is crucial in providing equal opportunities in the workplace and the House of Commons is no exception. Over 1500 staff work in and around the House of Commons and I hope that we can set an example to other employers by practising family friendly policies. I have given my full support to the



Bidding for the possessions of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at Sotheby's in New York

Photograph: Reuters

End of a love story

THE sale in New York of the household and personal effects of the late Duke and Duchess of Windsor is a historic and poignantly sad occasion—it is the final chapter to the truest love story of this century.

The Duke and Duchess were a couple who lived and

loved and faced their destiny, and I came to know them in France after they had lived many years in exile. In February 1972 the American Hospital of Paris where I was nursing at the time, asked me to take special charge of the Duke of Windsor after his exploratory operation.

The Duchess was severely

criticised, but in my view it was a relationship which started out as an innocent interest on her part, then through genuine love developed with landslide speed into a major monarchy crisis.

I know the world, and history, have judged the Duke of Windsor and found him wanting as a public figure; but I knew him as a private man. I came to

see that his courage in illness was as staunch as his courage in love. He was generous and never complained of the pain of illness or the pain of exile.

The depth of the Duchess's love was enduring. When I arrived at their home in the Bois de Boulogne to nurse him there after his release from hospital the Duchess gave me a gift, a

brooch of the smallest carnation in the world designed by the Duke and made by Cartier—to thank me for bringing the Duke safely home.

Now with no earthly collection of possessions left we must pray they are both safely home. OONAGH SHANLEY
TOFFOLO
London SW5

campaign by various trade unions representing staff of the House of Commons and I will continue to do so. RUTH KELLY MP
(Bolton West, Lab)
House of Commons
London SW1

HARRIET HARMAN's response (19 February) to your campaign is very disappointing. Instead of allowing us to spend our own money on whatever childcare arrangement we deem suitable, she is offering a national childcare strategy devised by politicians and implemented by "childcare workers".

For families with several small children, such as mine, no institutionalised childcare arrangement can be suitable. Having someone live-in has proved a workable solution for us, although I have to spend half of my income on childcare. My husband's income is nearly all spent on the mortgage (we pay £120 more since Labour came to power), which makes it imperative for me to work.

The solution put forward by *The Independent* has the advantage that it allows people to devise their own childcare strategy whether it means nurseries, neighbourhood childminding or nannies from Australia, rather than rely on Nanny Harman to do it for them. MARIANNE OGUBOYE
London SW19

ALASTAIR MEEKS (letter, 20 February) displays an all-too-common form of shortsightedness. If he plans to draw a pension of any kind, it will be other people's children who support him after his retirement. SAIRA SALIMI
London W10

Gulf crisis

WHAT a barbaric century this has been, with governments throughout the world deciding that it was permissible to slaughter unarmed people to further their aims. In spite of Dresden, Hiroshima and Vietnam, our politicians continue to cling to the bombing option.

This is a suitable time for the United Nations to consider the problem of war-against-civilian populations. We have reached the point where the defenceless now suffer the most, while the military is largely cocooned from the worst effects of its actions. We must strive to produce a culture of thought in the United Nations that outlaws blitzkrieg tactics. The major powers should decide, as an international principle, that the bombing of one nation by another is never to be regarded as a final "diplomatic" option.

JOHN EVANS
Cambridge

WE are being urged not to repeat the mistakes of history by

appealing a ruthless dictator. Another mistake of history we would do well not to forget—and one which contributed at least equally to the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939—is the dictated peace of the Treaty of Versailles. This taught us that it is short-sighted and dangerous to humiliate and ruin a proud nation.

The British have been taught more hard lessons than most in the history of conflict and conflict resolution across the world, not least of all in Iraq itself. Let us draw on this experience and really learn the lessons of our history, not just convenient sections from it. Dr BAUL O'PREY
Bristol

THE 1991 photograph of the retreating Iraqi convoy on the road to Basra stands as an arresting image of the brutality and horror of war. A US soldier, on viewing that carnage, remarked that this had been brought about "by the madness of one man". I wasn't sure then to whom he was referring, and now, seven years on, when I hear our Defence Secretary threatening "massive

damage" on Iraq, I again wonder where the madness lies. Dr MALCOLM MORRISON
Edinburgh

Landmine campaign

I HAVE not "quit" the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). In June of last year, VVAF began to publicly state its intention to greatly diminish its involvement or withdraw entirely from the international side of the campaign after the treaty was signed this past December in Ottawa, and to focus on the US. When the VVAF decided to abruptly terminate our relationship, I was immediately reaffirmed as co-ordinator of the ICBL by the other 10 members of the campaign's steering committee.

I am no longer with the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF). In June of last year, VVAF began to publicly state its intention to greatly diminish its involvement or withdraw entirely from the international side of the campaign after the treaty was signed this past December in Ottawa, and to focus on the US. When the VVAF decided to abruptly terminate our relationship, I was immediately reaffirmed as co-ordinator of the ICBL by the other 10 members of the campaign's steering committee.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Established by God

DESPITE what Paul Valley writes ("Established values", 19 February), the issue of the establishment, or possible disestablishment, of the Church of England, is not one which exercises the minds of clergy or laity a great deal. It is sometimes a nuisance, but otherwise all but irrelevant. The state regards us as established when it is convenient for it to do so, but when it comes to the paying of VAT, we are a private organisation.

I do what I do because I am a priest of a Christian church. My local church does what it does because it is part of the worldwide church, not because of any national link with the state. And we do what we do in collaboration, not competition, with the other churches in the area.

My job is to attempt to be a pastor to anyone, good, bad or indifferent, living in my parish: the job of my church is to open its doors and be available to them, come what may. We don't need to be established by the state to do that: our establishment is older than England itself. JOHN WILLIAMS
Rector of West Wittering and Bitham with Itchenor
West Wittering, West Sussex

Paying for the arts

ANDREAS Whitlam Smith's argument that "the best way to save the arts is to remove the single payer" (17 February) papers over a number of cracks.

He is incorrect to suggest that most arts organisations rely overwhelmingly on a single funder. This is not the case for many organisations who already put together a patchwork of income from many sources, including the Arts Council or regional arts boards, local authorities, businesses, box office and private giving. Whilst the loss of one of these sources would be damaging, it would not necessarily be fatal. Second, he assumes that, having plotted its demise, a culture of philanthropy towards the arts would spring up to carry the coffin of the Arts Council. I suspect that he is too optimistic. Whilst a number of Britain's larger arts institutions have indeed tapped into private giving, they have the

strength of being highly visible, national organisations which can offer a great deal to their donors in the form of kudos. Many less well-resourced companies might soon find themselves face down in the malmsey.

Smaller organisations cannot compete in terms of prising open the wallets of the wealthy. Their clients might be the young, the unemployed, the disabled. They may operate on a local level, so that much of their work is unseen. Or they may produce experimental work. All useful, necessary and potentially of very high quality, but just not "sexy" enough to attract private giving. They would consider life without public subsidy as being very unfair indeed. ROD BIRTLES
General Manager
Milton Keynes City Orchestra

Jobs for the bands

AS someone who has worked as a roadie and a tour manager, I find the views expressed by Alan McGee, the director of Creation Records, totally wrong (report, 18 February).

The musicians who are most productive are engaged in some sort of employment. They can relate to everyday life and also afford to tour. They are able to spend more money on decent rehearsal facilities and a recording studio, and on professional advice and equipment.

A look at any listings magazine will show how many bands are trying to "make it" at any given time. Very few will make it to become household names. Why doesn't the Government bring in a loan system, as they have for students, so that musicians may return the money paid to support them, when they become rich? CHRIS HAYES
London N2

Posse of preachers

GRAHAM DON suggests (letter, 19 February) a posse of missionaries be sent to Northern Ireland. The last thing Northern Ireland needs is more preachers. A posse to round up the existing ones seems a more attractive proposition. HOWARD INGRAM
Belfast

QUOTE UNQUOTE

"If Mo Mowlam has a fault it is that she can sometimes come into a room without opening the door first."
— Neil Kinnock, Euro-Commissioner.

"I sat behind Brigitte Bardot once in a restaurant, but the lady friend I was with wouldn't let me turn round to look at her."
— the Marquis of Bath.

"Sweat is holy water, pearls of liquid that release your past, an ancient form of self-healing. The more you sweat the more you pray. The more you pray the closer you come to ecstasy."
— Gabrielle Roth, guru of "the trance dance".

"Ah, so God finally caught his eye!" — George S Kaufmann, American playwright, on being told that the imperious head waiter of one of his favourite restaurants had died.

"When I want an idea I have a bath, and it just comes. By the time I go into rehearsals I'm very clean."
— Edward Hall, director at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

"I like to think of myself as an artist with a capital A."
— Yoko Ono.

هكذا من الاصل

Media workers unite, you have
nothing to lose but your anthraxDAVID
AARONOVITCH
SCRIBBLERS AGAINST
THE GULF WAR

It is regrettable that this newspaper, unlike the *Daily Telegraph* and the *New Statesman*, failed to publish the recent stirring letter protesting against the forthcoming war against Iraq, and written by a collective called Media Workers Against The War. The signatories included two comedians, a novelist, two *Guardian* columnists, the editor of the *Modern Review* and Paul Foot. As an old left-winger myself I wish that they had asked me to sign it too. The name is a good one; anything with the word "Worker" in it still makes me feel agreeably militant. And "Comedians And Columnists Against The War" doesn't have quite the same associative force.

Pointing out that the last Gulf war "was not a war at all, but a slaughter", the Media Workers make an impassioned plea that we should not lend credence to "a ruthless second adventure that will solve nothing in the Gulf and end in another bloodbath".

This must be right. A proper war entails thousands of deaths on both sides. As a model one could take the Iran-Iraq conflict, in which the invasion of Iran led to a 10-year struggle in which millions were killed or wounded. Dreadful though it was, it was nonetheless a true meeting of equals, not the appalling lopsided duck-shoot that the Gulf war became.

And what did the latter achieve? Apart from the liberation of Kuwait (a mixed blessing if ever there was one, especially for the Filipino worker-slaves of the Kuwaiti oligarchy), absolutely nothing.

Which brings us to the present. Having supplied Saddam with many of the agents necessary for the manufacture of horrific weapons of mass destruction, in the West now seem almost pedantically determined to prevent him from keeping them. While

the Media Workers and I support adherence to the United Nations Resolution number whatever-it-was, any sensible person cannot help but feel that such a necessarily intrusive process will be bound to provoke resistance from the Iraqi authorities. These problems should be handled politely, not with the language of threat and war. Anyway, he didn't actually use all that nerve gas during the Gulf war, did he?

And yet, here we are, preparing to send the bombers over to kill the terrified women and children (and men) of Iraq, simply so that we can get our hands on a vial or two of anthrax which Saddam may very well never even use. And all this without the support of any of the governments in the region. Friends, how insane can we get?

Insane, I'm afraid. For, actually, things are even worse than the Media Workers have realised. Just this week, in Las Vegas, two US citizens, Larry Wayne Harris and William Leavitt, were surrounded in their Mercedes by armed representatives of the discredited federal government, forced out of the vehicle and imprisoned without trial.

Why? Because it was thought that they might be in possession of anthrax, botulinus toxin and ricin – some of the most deadly substances known to man. The US Army's Biohazard team moved in and took away 10 bags marked "biological", which is now being tested at an Air Force base in Nevada.

There are some very interesting parallels here between this case and that of Iraq: parallels that tell us much about how we are governed. In the first place, it is not actually illegal for US citizens to possess (for their own purposes) such toxins. Why then arrest these men? Second, it is certain that the anthrax and botulinus toxin were purchased in the US itself, so how about that for hypocrisy?

Now, it is true that one of the Las Vegas Two, Mr Harris, had a previous conviction for fraudulently obtaining hubonic plague culture. But this fact merely serves to emphasise that he hadn't actually used either the hubonic plague or the anthrax. Mr Harris may not be great guy, but that doesn't mean that you've got to jump him.

Next, in another echo of the propaganda onslaught against Iraq, it was suggested that Mr Harris and Mr Leavitt were planning an anthrax strike against the New York subway. This accusation has now been firmly denied by the mayor of New York. So can one escape the suspicion that this arrest coincides too neatly with the latest stage of the Lewinsky investigation?

Of course it is true that Mr Harris is a well-known neo-Nazi, a member of the Christian Identity Church, for which Jews are "Satan's children", blacks are "mud people" and which supports toppling the democratically elected American government by force. And it is also true that his associates are rich, well-armed and bonkers. Though it must be said at once that Mr Harris is, if anything, slightly less anti-Semitic than the Iraqi regime (with whom he has, in the past, had contact).

But there is no evidence that dealing with such people by force does any good. It is always the innocent who suffer, whether in Baghdad or Waco. So to that end I call upon my comrades in Media Workers Against The War to join my campaign, just as I endorse theirs. My slogan? Give the Nazis Back Their Anthrax.

Yes, they pull a few (apron) strings, but is that a crime?

DAVID
WALKER
IN DEFENCE OF
FREEMASONRY

When Michael Higham, the Masonic bigwig, was being knocked about by MPs the other day he used a curious phrase. The Freemasons, he claimed, are a "freedom association". Masons? All that regalia, clandestine meetings, enigma wrapped in allegory, aprons, back-scratching and – without question – occasional dabbling in conspiracy to pervert the course of justice?

Yet he was right. Political freedom means that between state and individuals there have to exist layered institutions allowing us room to manoeuvre without interference from above. Our brand of free-market capitalism only works because economic activity is embedded in a dense network of social norms and relationships of trust, which form around voluntary organisations. Freemasonry is such an institution and such a form of trust. No Freemasons, less freedom.

You don't have to tip your wig to Edmund Burke to see his "little platoons" do embed us in society and help protect against tyranny. (Conspiracy theory watch: Burke was also a paid-up Mason.) One of Thatcherism's greatest errors was her misunderstanding of the nature of markets, as if individuals were the be-all and end-all when in fact – as the Russians are painfully discovering – without a dense civil society, market economies slip into crime and corruption.

Think, this weekend, of the ties that bind... the bowls clubs, boy scouts, the National Trust, Greenpeace, the United Reformed Church, Chelsea Football Club, the Attlee Memorial Runners... and, yes, the United Grand Lodge. None of them belongs to the state. Each is bigger than the individuals who form their members. Britain is thickly planted

with them; they are part of the national formula for political peace and social stability.

To call Chris Mullin, the Chairman of the Commons' Home Affairs Committee, a despot, would be silly. The balding, bespectacled Labour MP burished his credentials as a civil libertarian by his tireless campaigning against state intrusion on behalf of the Birmingham Six.

Yet he flirts with a dangerous attack not just on individual liberty – for why on earth should not grown men be allowed to join together for the purposes of rolling up their trouser legs if they so wish – but on the social foundations of liberty. A state which cannot tolerate, let alone protect, the privacy of its citizens, is a dangerous one indeed. Mr Mullin, on the left of the Labour Party, knows full well that the trade union movement only exists because the state deliberately decided not to look inside its lodges and rituals.

So it wasn't just the distastefulness of the bullying to which he and his colleagues subjected the Mason's chief executive (the MPs' credibility as earnest seekers after truth and justice would be a lot greater if they ever harried ministers in the same way). It was the disproportion in their response to allegations about Masonic involvement in conspiracy. So far,

in Britain, we have avoided importing the American culture of conspiracy. People here by and large believe that the problem with conspiracy is that, if it is to succeed, it requires conspirators to be amazingly clever. But when we look at the evidence, cock-up is always a better bet. From the arms-to-Iraq saga back to Buster Crabbe, the Cleveland child abuse or any other Great British Conspiracy: prefer the simple explanation every time.

Police officers – in the West Midlands, to name but one suspect force – were Masons. They conspired together. Injustice resulted. But is that really an indictment of Masonry rather than a condemnation of police management. The West Midlands Police Authority is more at fault than Masons.

Similarly in the courts. The problem is surely not that judges belong to a secret society but that the judiciary has, at least until recently, barely been managed and certainly not subjected to external scrutiny. You could add this to the charge sheet: if you appoint only men of a certain age, schooling and background to positions where their efficiency and effectiveness is never examined, is it really surprising they get away with... murder?

Masonry has, evidently, not lived up to its own ideals. On its escutcheon the Grand

Lodge says firmly that "any attempt to use membership to promote business, professional or personal interests" is contrary to its ethic; officially, a Mason's prime duty is to the law of the land. Brother constable and Master judge have let the side down in a big way... but then what organisation (churches included) ever lives up to its own ethical billing?

Masonry has always been a queer kind of secret society. Walk down the main street in Laurencekirk and the most imposing building – it challenges the Church of Scotland for size – is the Lodge. In Scotland, Masonry really does, like golf, belong to the people, or at least those involved in the building trade and medium-sized commerce. Step forward Brother Robbie Burns.

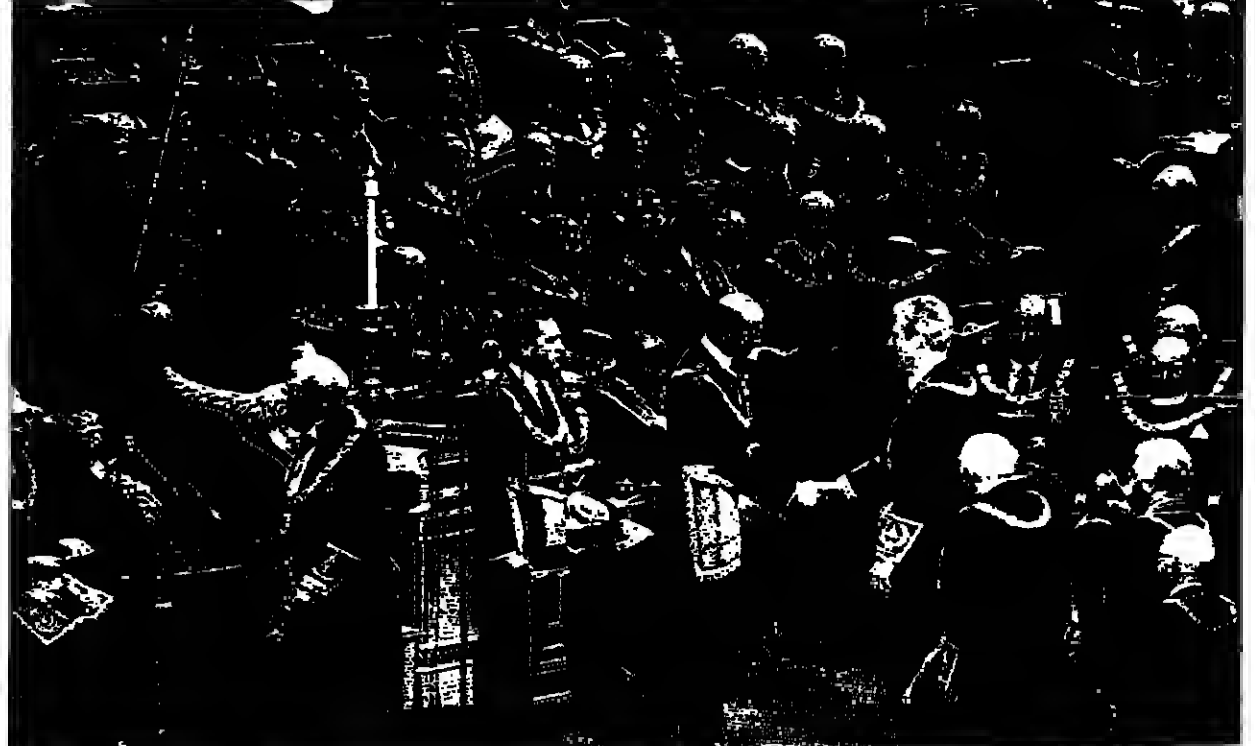
English Masonry, like most things English, is snootier. The Grand Lodge's web site (well, it was inevitable they would have one) lists among former grandees admirals, field marshals and bishops. But just because the Duke of Keot is Grand Master does not mean every fantasist's dream about Jack the Ripper being a royal deviant is true. Freemasons' lodges are only one among many forms of association. I confess that I belong to what used to be called a gentleman's club, with an imposing portico on Pall Mall – but it

does not make me either a gentleman or a potential conspirator against justice and good procedure.

Is Masonry really so tainted that Jack Straw is justified in forcing police officers and judges to declare membership as a condition of entry to the job... and if Masonry why not also membership of the MCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the Tory Party? How many private dining societies does the House of Commons support? To call this government's thinking about privacy incoherent is an understatement.

When Masons, rather wistfully, try to remind everyone that in the past they have been less wedded to the established order, they do have a point. After all Brother Wolfgang had a liberal, anti-authoritarian sensibility.

History will not save them but sociology ought to. The Grand Lodge should purchase for its library several copies of the books by (New Labour friendly) Robert Putnam on civil society in Italy and the United States along with... shelf of recent Demos pamphlets, especially those written by Geoff Mulgan, now resident at Number 10. All that stuff about networks, connectivity and trust... that is exactly what aprons, bare breasts, daggers and passwords are all about.



Shake a leg: celebrations for the Grand Masonic Lodge's 275th anniversary

Photograph: UPP

Draw a lace veil over the Lord Chancellor

ANTHONY
SCRIVENER
DERRY IRVINE'S
NEW CURTAINS

It is time people started to think about the Lord Chancellor's human rights – like everyone else he is entitled to a right or two. It really is too bad everyone giving him stick over a scrap of wallpaper and some alleged curtains. I have to say "alleged" because it appears that the curtains – allegedly – are covered by the Official Secrets Act and I do not want to end up in the Tower, not unless of course the Lord Chancellor is going to furnish my cell.

It's too much. Being accused of profligacy is a serious matter for a Scotsman, almost as bad as being called generous. As for looting his homeland's art treasures... just because he is borrowing a skip or two of pictures to deaden the impact of all that wallpaper.

The cancellarial apartment in the House of Lords overlooks the River Thames and it goes with m'lud's job. Some people get a Rover and some people get luncheon vouchers... the Lord Chancellor gets robes, black stockings, the right to sit on a sack of wool and an apartment.

So there you are with this apartment some 50ft above the ground and you obviously need curtains. Admittedly it's not quite like the housing estate where one spent one's childhood in abject poverty and where the neighbours and others could look in and see you changing your socks. But there is a risk of being seen by

helicopters and people in airliners on the flight path to Heathrow with binoculars or a telescope and a yen to have a quick peer. So obviously you need curtains for a bit of privacy. A Lord Chancellor has to take off and put on his trousers all through the day because he has to dress up for the House of Lords.

So there is this great need for curtains. But you can hardly expect the Lord Chancellor to go for the suburban lace variety from John Lewis (never

comfortable if one suspected that the Lord Chancellor did not have a bit of privacy for all the dressing and undressing he has to do? The fact is that a bit of decent material is needed – not some cheap smutter from Petticoat Lane.

It is the same with the wallpaper. You can hardly stick up Laura Ashley on bits of the national heritage – you don't see that at Windsor Castle or even the Palace. Although flock wallpaper sends out the right ethnic message we could not

Chancellor to wake up in the morning surrounded by 15ft high curtains with pulls and gold knobs on and Grecian urn type wallpaper, in a convertible sofa bed from a mail order catalogue? No, no. In these surroundings you need something grand and celestial: something you can ascend into at night and descend from in the morning.

It is not fair to compare the cost of all this with the cost of providing legal aid certificates. People who want legal

have such trouble when he was doing up Hampton Court. The Lord Chancellor is entitled to privacy like everyone else – see Clause Eight of the European Convention on Human Rights. The amount people spend on curtains or wallpaper or even cushions is a matter for privacy. Who knows how much William and Ffion spent on their curtains?

These are all private matters and they should be sensibly tucked away in the accounts as immaterial items under the heading of sundries or something like that. An Englishman's home is his castle and so's a Scotsman's apartment. It was to be hoped that the Human Rights Bill would ensure privacy with respect to the cost of a person's curtains and wallpaper. Sadly this may not be so. In such circumstances the use of the Official Secrets Act is an obvious choice. You never know what devices could be attached to the folds of expensive curtain material. There is an obvious security risk. The history of espionage is full of examples of secret policemen and security operatives stuffing microphones behind wallpaper.

You, private citizens, would not like to read about the cost of your curtains and wallpaper on the front page of a daily newspaper, would you? Let us lend our support, then, to the rights of my Lord Chancellor.

Anthony Scrivener QC is a former chairman of the Bar.

'Wouldn't it be uncomfortable knowing the Lord Chancellor did not have a bit of privacy for all the undressing he has to do. A bit of decent material is needed – and not some cheap smutter from Petticoat Lane'

really have the Lord Chancellor's pad looking like the local tandoori. So really do we have any choice other than to go for a thousand rolls or so of the hand-embroidered stuff.

This has to be a good use of public money. What people do not realise is that with this quality of merchandise you do not leave the leftovers in the garage – this is stuff you could sell to some Eastern potentate or the French to paste up in Versailles.

And now if that is not enough there is all this fuss about having a Ritz bed. Do we really expect the Lord

aid do not have the responsibility of looking after a bit of the National Heritage: all they are doing is embarking on some selfish litigation just to get some compensation for some injury or other they allege they have suffered. It is quite different and comes under a different budget altogether.

Nor do ordinary people understand the skill involved in getting money out of Her Majesty's Treasury to pay for curtains. And after that you have to get clearance from the spin doctors et al. Life is not easy. Cardinal Wolsey did not

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Molly Cusack Smith

MOLLY CUSACK SMITH was for several decades living proof that the world of Somerville and Ross was not yet dead in Ireland. Amid the "hard-riding country gentlemen" and to the echo of "porter-drinker's randy laughter", she epitomised Yeats's "indomitable Irishness". Whatever the poet of order and high courtesy might have made of her legendary abrasiveness, he would certainly have been immensely proud of her unassailable spirit.

Although she had been a successful couturier in London during the Second World War, it was as a horsewoman that Molly Cusack Smith was best known and admired. She was joint-master of the North Galway hunt for 38 years, from 1946 until she retired in 1984. She remained honorary master for the rest of her life.

Her fine horsemanship combined with a natural flamboyance made her a national figure in the drab Ireland of the 1940s. She nearly always stole the limelight at the Dublin Horse Show, and usually drew a standing ovation as she led the Galway Blazers into the ring at the Royal Dublin Society.

She hated the term "Anglo Irish" and over tired of pointing out that while she might have married into that particular strata of society, she came from one of the great Irish families – the O'Rourke of Bruffin. And besides, she insisted, she could swear as fluently in Gaelic as in English.

She was born in Dublin in 1905. Her father, Charles Treoch O'Rourke, owned a pack of harriers and hunted and farmed the wild and bare countryside of North Galway. The O'Rourke were one of many great Irish families who for

centuries paid obedience to the Anglo-Norman monarchs largely in order to safeguard their succession rights, which was not possible under the Irish clan system.

A precocious only child, Molly was educated in England and France and started hunting with her father's pack when she was ten. But after a disagreement with him over horses, she left for Paris. She started to study music but diverted to dress designing and in London established herself as a successful couturier, specialising in evening dresses. In later years she always designed her own hunting outfits.

During the Paris years she became an accomplished cook, moved in artistic circles and had her portrait done by Augustus John. She met her future husband, Sir Dermot Cusack Smith, at a wartime cocktail party in London. They wed in 1940 but the marriage soon failed and Sir Dermot died while the divorce was going through. In a 1992 interview she said the match was a very suitable one. "He was very rich and had a title," she said. "We got engaged because it seemed a good idea. But, actually, it wasn't."

Back in Ireland she hunted with the Galway Blazers, founded by her ancestor John Denis O'Rourke in 1844, and – amazingly for the 1940s – became the hunt's first woman master. But she soon formed her own pack and kennelled them at her splendid Georgian home, Bermingham House, near Tuam, Co Galway.

Life at Bermingham House continued in the style of the Anglo-Irish gentry, most of whom had long been driven from their fine houses by IRA arson squads or the tax gatherers of the new Irish state. On normal

days drinks started at 4pm in the summer house during which Cusack Smith would sometimes sing her favourite song, "The West's Awake". Dinner was always early. The social highlight of the year was the annual hunt ball – described by one guest as "the last clation call of the stranded gentry" – which was always held on the first Friday in January and continued until this year.

Molly Cusack Smith, hunting horn at the ready, presided over this grand affair, encouraging reluctant diners to leave the har with deafening blasts from her hunting horn.

Nimble of mind and sharp of tongue, she was known throughout Ireland for her strong language and her ability to scurry anyone foolish enough to cross her. Desmond Guinness recalls an occasion when the pack was pursued by an angry farmer who started to stone Cusack Smith and her horse. She ordered her companions to move on while she remonstrated with her tormentor. A member of the party who stayed to give her support was rendered speechless by the ferocity of her attack.

On another occasion, when she was giving luncheon to a party which included the President of Ireland, she is reputed to have told a senior ecclesiastic of the Church of Ireland, who had presented himself a minute or two before the appointed hour, that he had better "get to f--- out of here" so that she might complete her preparations.

To say that she was formidable is to do her an injustice. As with old Mrs Knox in *The Irish RM*, she directed her underlings with bluntness "while she herself pervaded all spheres."

Although she never denied it, in her old age she grew impatient



Cusack Smith: horsemanship combined with a natural flamboyance. Photograph: Ray Ryan

of any retelling of an anecdote that had currency throughout the country and was told wherever enthusiasts of the turf or the hunt congregated. According to the story, when a groom remarked

on the sweaty condition of her horse, Molly Cusack Smith, dismounting, retorted: "You'd be sweaty, too, if you'd spent the past three hours between my legs."

Molly Adele O'Rourke, huntswoman and couturier; born Dublin 31 March 1906; married 1940 Sir Dermot Cusack Smith Bt (died 1970; one daughter); died Galway 16 February 1998.

Sir David Crouch

DAVID CROUCH was one of those many politicians possessed of copious talents and great commitment, who never seemed to be in the right place, holding the right ideas, at the right time to gain, hold, and acquire ministerial office. Indeed, as he once rather wryly observed to me, he failed at the polls when the whole ethos of conservatism was well-disposed towards parliamentary candidates who were of his way of thinking; and was victorious at the polls when the tide of Conservative thinking was turning against him.

By these conversational remarks he meant to point to the fact that, in the general election of 1959, when Harold Macmillan had swept all before him, he had failed to secure a seat in Leeds. He was an ardent Macmillanite, constantly referring his friends to Macmillan's inter-war book, *The Middle Way* (1938), the bible of those who believed in the possibility of an effective reconciliation, with vastly beneficial social welfare consequences, between capital and labour. Had Crouch won in Leeds he would have certainly put at least a toe on the ladder of ministerial preferment.

When he did win a seat in Canterbury in the 1966 general election, it was victory for him but a result which stood against the disastrous national crushing of the Tories by Labour. Moreover, the intellectual tide in Conservative politics was changing. Now the vague social emollient of the Macmillan years was out, and the tide of harsh competition was in. I have put the contrast between the two schools of thought rather simply: there were many shades of emphasis on both sides. But there is a certain truth here, and David Crouch was never able to surf successfully on either tide.

None of this, however, quelled the essential ebullience of his nature. Born in 1919, and educated at University College School, he evinced an early talent for self-publicity. His career, indeed, mainly lay in the appreciation of his quite extraordinary ability both to understand the real merits of any product he was marketing, and to be able to communicate those merits to almost any audience. Indeed, his wife Margaret, the daughter of a soldier, whom he married in 1947, once said, jokingly, that she had been lured by his silver tongue.

He was a handsome man, and a fine speaker, but he did not become a valued senior employee of ICI, nor a director of the International Wool Secretariat or a director of Pfizer solely because of his charm. There was a very hard edge to his bonhomie, and an ability to see the administrative ne-

cessities of any business he chose to advise; and there were many.

I first saw, however, the brilliantly ameliorative side of his nature in 1969. A general election it was clear, could not be long delayed. There were many who while enthusiastically supportive of Edward Heath's generally stringent proposed economic policies, were anxious that they should not be propped at the expense of serious concern for the disadvantaged in society.

The expensive teams of public relations consultants – the forerunners of today's spin doctors – were solely concerned with empty image. But Crouch was to hand. At great expense of time and energy, and for no remuneration, he helped youngsters like myself to make sure that the real needs of the people were not forgotten in the welter of party battle.

The Conservative Political Centre published an influential pamphlet: "Serving the Old". I wrote the text, and there were many contributors to the ideas; but the hand that guided my pen was that of David Crouch.

He published, in 1987, a delightful hook, part recollection, part history, part philosophical reflection, *A Canterbury Tale*. It is now out of print, but somebody ought to revive it, so that readers can see how practicality and compassion can be combined.



Crouch: compassion

Crouch was never very willing, like many of his generation, to talk about his war experience. But he served in London through the tortures of the Blitz, and for the whole of the six awful years. That period, I believe shaped his character, as it did that of many others. Memories, as *A Canterbury Tale* shows, formed an important part of the character of a considerable man.

Patrick Cosgrave

David Lance Crouch, politician and marketing and public relations consultant; born 23 June 1919; MP (Conservative) for Canterbury 1966-87; Ke 1987; married 1947 Margaret Noakes (one son, one daughter); died Faversham, Kent 18 February 1998.



James played the game with every ounce of his being

Robbie James

ROBBIE JAMES gave his life to Welsh football. He played 47 times for his country, always displaying the passionate fervour demanded of every man who does the red shirt, but arguably it was for his immense achievements at club level that he made the most vivid impression.

As an indefatigably competitive attacking midfielder, James played an integral part in Swansea City's prodigious feat of sweeping from the Football League's basement division to its top flight in the space of four years. Then, having earned his place among the elite, he did not flounder as some lower-league performers do following such a meteoric rise. Indeed, he excelled, not missing a game during the 1981/82 campaign in which the Swans finished sixth in the table, the most exalted position in their history. In addition, he was top scorer with 14 goals, no mean attainment in a side containing fellow Welsh luminary Leighton James and the prolific English marksman Boh Latchford.

Though it was clear from

childhood that he was a talented footballer, Robbie James did not plunge straight into the professional game on leaving school, instead taking a job with an electrical firm. However, in March 1973, after attracting interest from both Cardiff City and Arsenal, he signed as an amateur for his local club, Swansea.

Under the shrewd guidance of its manager Harry Gregg, the former Manchester United goalkeeper and survivor of the Munich air crash, the solidly built James made such rapid progress that he was given his senior debut only two months later, aged only 16, on the day City slipped from the Third to the Fourth Division. Thereafter he became a Swansea stalwart, enormously strong and combative, but also skilful and versatile enough to perform in either midfield or the front line.

The Swans' astonishing sequence of promotions, all during the managerial reign of John Toshack, began in 1977/78, the season in which James made his full international

debut in a 7-0 victory over Malta at Wrexham. The rise continued in 1978/79 and 1980/81, but sadly the golden peak of 1981/82 was followed by relegation a year later.

At this point, having helped Swansea to three consecutive Welsh Cup triumphs, James opted to remain in the top grade by accepting a £160,000 transfer to Stoke City. Somehow he never did himself justice in the Potteries, but spent three more productive First Division campaigns with Queen's Park Rangers before dropping to the Second with Leicester in 1987.

At Filbert Street James became a right-back, helping in the development of a young defence before returning to Swansea as captain in January 1988. That spring proved eventful as he won his last Wales cap on his 31st birthday, then led his new charges to promotion from the Fourth Division.

James pocketed another Welsh Cup winner's medal in 1989, before serving Bradford City for two seasons and joining Cardiff City in 1992. Still as

enthusiastic as ever at the age of 36, he took a prominent role in the Bluebirds' Division three title triumph of 1992/93 and collected his fifth and final Welsh Cup medal. When his League career ended later that year, he had made 782 appearances, a total bettered by only a handful of others, and scored 133 goals.

James went on to serve non-League Merthyr Tydfil and Barry Town, and was player-manager of Llanelly when he collapsed and died during a match with Portcawl. To the very last he played the game the only way he knew how, with every ounce of his being.

Ivan Ponting

Robert Mark James, footballer; born Gorseinon, Glamorgan 23 March 1957; played for Swansea City 1973-83, Stoke City 1983-84, Queens Park Rangers 1984-87, Leicester City 1987-88, Swansea City 1988-90, Bradford City 1990-92, Cardiff City 1992-93; capped 47 times for Wales 1978-88; twice married (one son, two daughters); died Llanelly, Dyfed 18 February 1998.

FAITH & REASON

The Black Death sails across the Gulf

On the anniversary of the plague our ships are setting sail to wage war on a biological terror. John Kennedy reflects on some uncomfortable parallels.

The Black Death came to Western Europe 650 years ago this month. It shook and shaped Europe more than any other event in our history. The anniversary coincides with the launching of a plan to crush Saddam Hussein's capacity for biological warfare. This conjunction naturally provokes some nervous thought.

First, the story. In February 1348, the first victims landed in Italian ports. There is a graphic account of galley crews dying at their oars as they sought haven at Genoa, to be driven back with flaming arrows. The pestilence had till then raged in Asia for years – a fitting torment for the heathen Turk. But in two years it killed a third of Europeans, brought to us along routes created in the great crusades against the infidel.

The epidemic was caused by a bacillus which flees carried to rats and to humans. At the time the best explanation was offered by the University of Paris

whose scholars suggested a fatal conjunction of planets, giving rise to a poisonous miasma in the atmosphere. The religious culture of the day insisted that those living was the cause: ome commentators denounced the teedoe of girls to dress rather saucily as men. "But God, in this matter, as in all others, brought marvellous remedy," he concluded. Langland, in *Piers Plowman* was clear: "These pestilences were for pure sin".

So cure was sought in penitence as much as in prudential hygiene. There grew up great armies of penitential flagellants, whose marchings and thrashings sometimes became something unspeakably awful with the massacre of Jews, usually by burning. In contrast, countless good people went to certain death to offer less than certain help to others – acts of real heroism, or more truly, sainthood.

Two other responses developed. The first was the spontaneous flight into a faith of personal protection. Around 1350, first names became much more explicitly Christian as the people gathered round protective saints – Sebastian, Nicholas, Lawrence, and above all Mary. The second response was rather different: the Boccaccio tendency. Boccaccio lived through the worst of the pestilence in Florence, and testified to a sensuality experienced in the midst

of terror. So a quite new literature of carnal affirmation arose, first in Italian, then in French and then in Chaucer's English.

Remarkably, the plague scarcely interrupted the political conflicts of the time – in the English case, fighting the French. Within four years of the battle of Crécy in 1346, nearly half of all English and French had died of plague, but by 1352 they were back to the husoos of slaughter as usual. In all the panic, saintliness and hysterical cruelty, one motif dominates. It is the sheer animal vitality that simply struggled, fed and bred through the whole episode. The following age was less kindly and simply pious; it was crueler, more credulous and more cynical. But it had also begun to celebrate its own human complexity, as Chaucer and Boccaccio testify.

Centuries later, the fleet dispatched to the Persian Gulf has crossed the path of those medieval plague galleys. And we feel that we understand creation much more profoundly now, and manage it so much more effectively. But how foolish we would be to trust that feeling. Even our forebears would gaze to see the world-threatening modern reality which sees us fighting to deny doomsday weapons to Baghdad, while countenancing them with apparent equanimity in Tel Aviv. It is only one example. We are generating complex-

ities and sorting through them at a speed far more frightening than the rat-flea combinations of the medieval Levant.

It may be that, even now, our nemesis is heading towards New York and London in a flotilla of battered Lebanese freighters. Yet we have a simple confidence in ourselves that our medieval forebears dared ascribe only to God. Ironically, the first example of that arrogance of modernity was created in their time, in Gothic Siena. It is Ambrogio Lorenzetti's vast fresco, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*. It depicts the splendours of the one and the evils of the other. It is entirely bereft of Christian symbol or humility. It celebrates a world manageable within given laws, under human control. It was completed in 1347, just as its creator and his city vanished into the unmanageable horror of the Pestilence.

The question arises – can many more anniversaries of the Black Death pass without some drastic failure of human management? We have the technology to clone the Four Horsepersons of the Apocalypse, and it is incredible that we shall escape the consequences. Our delusions and perversions continue to be celebrated in the name of truth and justice. It seems a valuable part of the Christian discipline to imagine ourselves into that catastrophic past, as preparation for what might be to come.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

BIRTHS

ARTHUR: to Jojo Moyes and Charles Arthur, on 2 February, a daughter, Susie Elise. Wonderfully healthy, especially her lungs.

DEATHS

TINSLEY: John, Canon Emeritus of Southwark Cathedral, died peacefully on 17 February 1998, aged 80 years. Beloved husband of Jill. Funeral on Friday 27 February at Kingston St Mary, Surrey at 2.30pm followed by private cremation. No flowers please. Donations if wished to Christian Aid may be sent to E. White & Son Ltd, Funeral Directors, 138/139, East Road, Tunbridge Wells TN11 9JH.

MEMORIAL SERVICES

ALLENBY: A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of John Allenby CBE will take place on Thursday 12 March at 12 noon at the Church of All Saints, Croydon, Surrey. All are welcome.

Announcements for Deaths may be telephoned to 0171-293 2012 or faxed to 0171-293 2010, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra).

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

TODAY: Prince Edward attends the Rugby Football Union match, England v Wales, at Twickenham, Middlesex. The Princess Royal, Patten, Scottish Rugby Union, attends the Scotland v France International Match at Murrayfield Stadium, Edinburgh.

Changing of the Guard

TODAY: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment presents the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am. TOMORROW: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment presents the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am. No 7 Company Coldstream Guards mounts the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am, band provided by the Coldstream Guards.

Birthdays

TODAY: King Harald V of Norway, 61; Sir John Bourn, Comptroller and Auditor General, 64; Professor Ruth Bowden, anatomist, 83; Miss Jilly Cooper, author and journalist, 61; M Hubert de Givency, fashion designer, 71; Mr Michael Deakin, documentary film maker, 59; Ms Leslie Davlin, silversmith, 85; Baroness Fookes, former MP, 62; Sir John Gouden, UK Permanent Representative, North Atlantic Council, 57; Sir Michael Grylls, former MP, 64; Sir Conrad Heron, former senior civil servant, 52; Sir Reginald Hibern, former ambassador to France, 76; Sir John McGregor Hill, former chairman, British Nuclear Fuels, 77; Lord Hunter, a former Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland, 85; Mr Peter McEnery, actor, 58; Mr Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe, 74; Professor Sir Rupert Myers, scientist, 77; Ms Diana Morgan MP, 46; General Sir Robert Pascoe, former Adjutant-General, 66; Sir Ashley Ponsbury, former Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, 77; Professor John Prescott, principal, Wye College, University of London, 61; Lieut-Gen Sir John Richards, former marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, 71; Mr Alan Rickman, actor, 52; Professor Frederick Rimmer, Emeritus Professor of Music, 84; Miss Nina Simone, singer, 64; Professor Leslie Wagner, Vice-Chancellor, Leeds Metropolitan University, 55; Mr David Wood, actor and playwright, 54.

TOMORROW: The Duchess of Kent, 66; Miss Judy Cornwell, actress, 56; Mr Joseph Eridgen, fashion designer, 62; Professor Sir Brian Follett, Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick, 59; Mr Bruce Forsyth, entertainer, 70; Miss Sheila Hancock, actress, 65; Senator Edward Kennedy, 66; Sir John Kerr, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, and Head of the Diplomatic Service, 56; Mr Niki Lauda, motor-racing champion, 49; Miss Frances Line, former

contoller, BBC Radio 2, 58; Mr Devan Malcolm, cricketer, 35; Sir Christopher Meyer, ambassador to the United States, 54; Sir John Mills, actor, director and producer, 90; M Noel Murphy, rugby footballer, 61; Mr Richard Page MP, 57; Mr Nigel Planer, actor, 45; Mr Marshall Graeme Robertson, Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Strike Command, 53; Lieut-Gen the Hon Sir William Rouse, former Quarter Master General, Ministry of Defence, 59; Sir William Slack, consultant surgeon, 73; Mr Ian Stark, show jumper, 44; Lord Strathclyde, Opposition Chief Whip in the House of Lords, 38; Miss Julie Walters, actress, 48; Mr Robert Young, actor, 91.

Anniversaries

TODAY: Births: John Henry Newman, Cardinal, 1801; Wylan Hugh Auden, poet, 1907; Deaths: Malcolm X (Little), black leader, murdered 1965. On this day the Battle of the Fosse Day of St George of Amiens, St Germanus of Granville, St Peter Damian, St Robert Southwell and St Severian of Sothopolis. TOMORROW: Births: George Washington, First President of the US, 1732; Arthur Eric Rowton Gill, artist, sculptor and typographer, 1885; Luis Bunuel, film director, 1900. Deaths: Amerigo Vesputi, navigator, 1512; Andy Warhol (Andrew Warhola), Tomorrow: The Feast Day of St Barabas, St Margaret of Cortona and Saints Thalassius and Linnaeus.

Lectures

TODAY: British Museum: Rowena Loverance, "Icons in Byzantium", 1.15pm.

TOMORROW

Trace Gallery: Laurence Bradbury, "Howard's Extrajudicial Intimacies", 2.30pm.

Sema shares soar as Government awards £305m deal to disability assessors

By Peter Thal Larsen

THE DEPARTMENT of Social Security yesterday awarded a huge contract to handle the medical assessment of disability benefit claims to Sema, the Anglo-French computer services group. News of the deal, worth £305m over a five-year period, sent shares in Sema soaring. They ended the day up 72.5p at 1910p.

Under the terms of the controversial contract, which has faced stiff trade union opposition, Sema will take over the management of 220 Civil Service doctors, 1,200 administrative staff and the 3,000 part-time doctors who help assess whether claimants qualify for disability or incapacity benefit.

The DSS said that Sema would

bring enhanced management and increased investment in technology to the Benefits Agency Medical Service, thereby speeding up the service.

John Tilley, managing director of Sema, said: "The Sema Group working with the DSS will modernise the existing provision with the aim of giving claimants service improvements and taxpayers better value for money."

The move is unusual for Sema, which normally specialises in information technology (IT) outsourcing and systems integration projects. Although the BAMS project involves some information technology, it is more of a pure outsourcing project, requiring superior organisational and management skills. Sema is understood to have beaten

off bids from rival outsourcing groups such as Capita and Andersen Consulting to win the contract.

The DSS insisted that the decision to award the contract was not

part of the wider review of the welfare state which is currently taken place, and added that it does not have a dogmatic view about outsourcing services to private contractors.

However, the award of the contract suggests that the pace of outsourcing is unlikely to slow under the Labour government, even though several contracts, like BAMS, were

first dreamed up under the previous administration.

The Labour government has already awarded a £450m contract to handle the pay, pensions and administration for the armed forces to EDS, the US outsourcing giant.

It is also currently conducting trials for a huge contract to improve efficiency in the Benefits Agency and help reduce fraud. Groups on the shortlist include a partnership between IBM and EDS, as well as a consortium including Sema and management consultancy group Deloitte & Touche. The contract is expected to be awarded in the next six months.

However, many large government outsourcing deals have run into problems. The Inland Revenue com-

puter system, designed by EDS as part of a £1.6bn contract, crashed under the burden of self-assessment claims. And a two-year delay to a £1.5bn contract designed to pay benefits with electronic "smart cards" and computerise Post Offices around the country, managed by ICL, has prompted the government to consider bringing in rival suppliers.

Given the size and complexity of the contracts, industry experts are not surprised that they frequently run into problems. "If I had a huge computer contract to award I would divide it between three or four companies," said Richard Holway, an industry analyst. "But the Government seems to think that these large contracts still make sense."

Philips breaks off Origin stake talks with Price Waterhouse

PHILIPS, the Dutch electronics giant, yesterday announced that talks with Price Waterhouse, about the consulting group taking a minority stake in Origin, Philips' services and consulting arm, had broken down after the two parties failed to agree a price.

Philips agreed to sell the stake to Price Waterhouse last October but did not disclose the price. After several delays, negotiations have now broken down.

However, Philips said that the strategic alliance between Origin and Price Waterhouse would continue. The two companies currently co-operate in supplying complex enterprise resource planning services, which

help companies manage their most important activities.

Separately, Origin said it had appointed Robert E. Pickering, a former President of US IT services group BSG Alliance/IT, as its chief executive.

Origin has been one of the fastest-growing divisions of Philips since it was set up as a separate division in 1996. Last year, its sales grew by 21 per cent and it posted its first profit. However, Philips is currently involved in a massive reorganisation which involves it pulling out of all businesses which are peripheral to its main activities. The company is now expected to consider floating Origin as a separate company.

Bass set to win Inter-Continental with £1.7bn offer

By Andrew Yates

BASS is poised to buy Inter-Continental, the upmarket hotel group, in what promises to be the biggest deal in its ever made. The British brewing, hotels and leisure giant is understood to be on the brink of signing a deal to purchase the 211-storied hotel chain for more than £2.8bn (£1.7bn) from Seibu Saison, a private Japanese group.

Bass has fought off stiff competition from Marriott International and Patriot American Hospitality, the US hotel magnates, and Ladbroke Group, the UK leisure group, to win a bidding war for Inter-Continental. The acquisition is likely to be announced within days.

Inter-Continental would be a good fit for Bass, which owns the Holiday Inn chain but lacks a strong, five-star, luxury hotel brand.

The two groups would also complement each other geographically. Holiday Inn has a big presence in the US, while

Inter-Continental is stronger in Europe and the Far East.

One City observer said: "This deal makes a lot of sense strategically. Bass has lacked a top-quality hotel brand and this deal plugs the gap that the group had in its portfolio and gives it a good presence around the world."

Bass shares fell 26.5p to 960p, however, over fears that the group may overpay for Inter-Continental. Mark Flannery, leisure analyst at NatWest Securities said: "We estimate that Saison makes an EBITDA, [annual profit before interest, tax and depreciation] of around \$180m. If Bass pays more than \$2.8bn the deal will be on a very puny multiple."

Another industry analyst said: "The share price fall reflects nervousness that Bass has been forced to pay too much to win the bidding war. The group is dripping with debt and nobody is quite sure how much debt will be included in the deal."

The deal will create one of

the highest hotel groups in the world. Inter-Continental has 211 hotels in 77 countries and 24 more under construction. Of these, 117 trade under the Inter-Continental name, including London flagship hotels on Hyde Park and Mayfair and there are hotels in most of the main capitals of Europe. It has sites throughout Asia including three in Japan, and a large hotel in Seoul, South Korea. The group also has 20 mid-market Forum hotels and 50 Global Partnerships, where it has teamed up with local operators to run sites.

Bass already has 2,380 hotels, including almost 1,600 Holiday Inns. It has 134 Crown Plaza sites, its own upmarket brand. Analysts believe they could eventually be converted to Inter-Continental sites as the group seeks to create a strong position in the premium hotel market.

The deal caps a period of frenetic corporate activity that has seen Bass sell off its tenanted pub estate, the Coral betting chain and Gala biogo



Room with an upmarket view: The Inter-Continental hotel in Hyde Park, London

Photograph: Lucy Blake

Rogerson gets £200,000 pay-off from BG

By Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

BG, the former British Gas, last night announced the departure of deputy chairman Philip Rogerson, who famously described plans to slash pipeline charges by the industry regulator, Clare Spottiswoode, as "the biggest smash-and-grab raid ever".

Mr Rogerson, 53, departs with a £200,000 pay-off and a £149,000 company pension. He was on a fixed-term contract with BG until the end of 1999 with a basic salary of £320,000.

He is to become non-executive chairman of a BG subsidiary, Pipeline Integrity International, which the group yesterday said it had sold to Mercury Asset Management's Private Equity arm for £90m. Pipeline Integrity, based in Cramlington, Northumberland, is responsible for high tech inspection of the gas pipeline network using equipment nicknamed the "intelligent pig".

Mercury has raised £116m from private investors and in debt to fund the purchase, which includes a deferred payment of £6m to BG dependent on the company's performance over five years. Tony Powell, from Schlumberger, has been drafted in as chief executive.

Mr Rogerson was responsible for piloting BG's complaint against pipeline cuts through the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC), which last year rejected much of the company's case. He had previously said he would leave BG after the MMC probe concluded and has already become non-executive director of the Halifax and deputy chairman of Aggreko, the power hire specialists.

NatWest moves to placate institutions with director appointments

By Andrew Verity

NATWEST, the troubled banking giant, yesterday moved to bring its battle with institutions to an end by appointing the chief executive of Boots, the executive chairman of a packaging company and the man who rescued Lloyd's of London from disaster as non-executive directors.

Lord Blyth of Rowington, chief executive and deputy chairman of Boots, is widely tipped to take over as chairman when Lord Alexander leaves next year.

Sir David Rowland, the former chairman of Lloyd's of London who saved the insurance market from collapse, and Anthony Hahgood, chief exec-

utive of Bunzl, will join the board in April. A spokesman said the move was an injection of "new blood to refresh the board".

Lord Alexander has come under attack for his stewardship of NatWest especially after last year's discovery of a £90m derivatives loss at NatWest Markets, its investment banking arm, the resignation of the unit's chief

executive and the sale of its equities division to Bankers Trust.

Lord Blyth has the reputation for value-driven management which analysts say would be welcomed by investors who have seen NatWest underperform its peers in the banking sector over recent years.

Lord Alexander has indicated previously that he is unlikely

to continue as chairman after completing 10 years in the job in 1999.

Institutions began pressing for new board members last year after the board was seen to have made sluggish progress in fixing a merger to secure the group's long-term survival.

The bank also announced that Sir Desmond Pitcher had

resigned with immediate effect. NatWest's nominations committee, which includes Derek Wanless, chief executive, had refused to renew his nomination.

Sir John Banham, who has become chairman of Tarmac and Kingfisher since joining NatWest, will stand down as he approaches the end of a five-year term. A spokesman for

NatWest said yesterday that both departures were amicable and nothing to do with disagreements over corporate strategy.

City analysts yesterday welcomed the move. Shares rose slightly to 1168p from 1160p. As recently as last summer, the shares were languishing at around 700p.

Hong Kong reacts angrily to credit downgrade

By Stephen Vines
in Hong Kong

THE HONG KONG government has reacted with barely suppressed fury after the Moody's credit rating agency downgraded its short-term credit rating for the first time in 14 years. Moody's warned the territory's financial markets face more risk from Asia's economic turmoil.

Sir Donald Tsang, Hong Kong's financial secretary, described the move as "unfair, unreal and improper". He accused Moody's of simply including Hong Kong "in the same broad brush of all the other countries affected by the currency crises", ignoring the stability of the Hong Kong dollar.

Moody's said the downgrade

resulted from increased volatility in East Asian markets, which was affecting the Hong Kong environment. However, the agency noted that the territory's "fiscal situation and regulatory environment remain sound".

Short-term debt of the two Hong Kong railway corporations, previously blue-chip rated borrowers, has been downgraded from Prime-1 to Prime-2. The outlook for foreign currency borrowings of these two institutions and other prime Hong Kong borrowers has also been downgraded from stable to negative.

Although there was considerable surprise at these revelations, investors seemed less concerned than the Hong Kong government. The stock market

inched marginally upwards after a day of lacklustre trading. The benchmark Hang Seng Index rose 0.6 per cent to 10,551.70. Stocks likely to be affected by the Moody's re-rating showed no sign of being marked down.

Moody's also raised some eyebrows by reclassifying the outlook for China's bonds, notes and bank deposits from stable to negative. It said the downgrade reflected "policy constraints associated with exchange rate management" following the incorporation of Hong Kong into China. This could have "possible adverse effects on the competitiveness of China's export sector over the immediate term".

In other words, Moody's believes China will not devalue its

currency and make it more competitive because it fears this may destroy the fixed link between the Hong Kong dollar and the US dollar.

There is no indication in recent export figures that China is becoming less competitive. The export sector continues to account for less than 10 per cent of the Chinese economy's output and is therefore far less important to the economy as a whole in comparison with the Asian countries suffering from financial turmoil.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, Peter Gontha, a businessman close to the family of President Suharto, said a currency board, which would peg the rupiah to the dollar, would be effective in stabilising the currency, but only

if banking reforms were completed first.

Mr Gontha has been widely rumoured as the person responsible for bringing the currency board proposal to President Suharto's attention - a claim he has repeatedly denied.

Speaking at a discussion on the currency board, Mr Gontha said he did not believe, as widely feared, that such a system would trigger a rush for dollars in turn forcing Bank Indonesia to deplete its foreign exchange reserves defending the currency.

Indonesian stocks fell for a second day as the prospect of the rupiah being pegged to the dollar became less likely. The Jakarta Stock Exchange Composite Index fell 1.02 points or 0.21 per cent to 495.2

Japan's economic package fails to provide the expected stimulus

JAPAN'S ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has dashed hopes by producing an economic stimulus package which fell far short of expectations, writes Stephen Vines.

The package, issued yesterday, cooled neither the tax cutting or increased government spending measures which were anticipated by the financial markets. The stock market responded apathetically, ending the day up less than 1 per cent.

The package, which had been heralded as a move to boost the flagging economy, focused on deregulation measures and a clutch of soft loans to troubled East Asian coun-

tries. These measures were accompanied by others floated by LDP leaders to recent weeks.

The measures included improving balance sheets by revaluing land assets held by companies and banks, making it easier for companies to buy back their own shares, promoting the building of second homes and encouraging private companies to get involved in infrastructure projects.

There is still a possibility of new tax initiatives in a supplementary budget to be issued once Japan's parliament has completed the budgetary process at the end of March or in early April.

"We are confident that from here on, all of those measures will produce a multiplier effect and that our economy will certainly have a strong recovery," said the LDP in the introduction to the package. However, this is the fifth so-called economic stimulus package to have been issued since the Asian financial crisis began at the end of last year. None of the packages have been viewed by investors as tackling fundamental problems.

Japan's apparent reluctance to reflate the economy is a major problem for other Asian nations who have been looking to Tokyo to give the region a lead.

STOCK MARKETS

Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	5751.80	23.10	0.58	6744.70	4189.10	3.08
FTSE 250	5029.20	12.50	0.25	5918.10	4384.20	3.07
FTSE 100	5751.80	23.10	0.58	6744.70	4189.10	3.08
FTSE 100	5751.80	23.10	0.58	6744.70	4189.10	3.08
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FTSE 100	5751.80	23.10	0.58	6744.70	4189.10	3.08

INTEREST RATES

Rate	3 month	6 month	1 year	1 1/2 year	2 year	3 year	5 year	10 year	30 year
UK 10 year gilt	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
US long bond	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85
Money Market Rates	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.85

CURRENCIES

Currency	at 5pm	Change	Yr Ago	at 5pm	Change	Yr Ago
Dollar	1.6377	+0.0226	1.6123	1.6377	+0.0226	1.6123
Mark	2.9853	+0.1997	2.7174	2.9853	+0.1997	2.7174
Yen	209.12	+2.4248	197.67	209.12	+2.4248	197.67
Index	104.80	+0.10	97.40	104.80	+0.10	97.40
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						
Other Indicators						

TOURIST RATES

Country	Rate	Country	Rate	Country	Rate
Australia (dollars)	2.3484	Italy (lira)	2.865	USA (\$)	1.6008
Austria (schillings)	20.32	Japan (yen)	205.57		
Belgium (francs)	59.75	Malta (lira)	0.6289		
Canada (\$)	2.2726	Netherlands (guilders)	3.2556		
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8444	Norway (kroner)	11.09		
Denmark (kroner)	11.09	Portugal (escudos)	294.68		
Finland (markka)	8.8388	Spain (pesetas)	244.67		
France (francs)	9.6954	South Africa (rand)	7.7633		
Germany (marks)	2.9026	Sweden (kroner)	12.90		
Greece (drachmes)	457.92	Switzerland (francs)	2.3449		
Hong Kong (\$)	2.31	Turkey (lira)	358.367		
Ireland (pounds)	1.161				



JEREMY WARNER ON HOW VIRGIN IS BECOMING THE BUTT OF BRITAIN'S ANTI-BUSINESS CULTURE

Why Branson is suddenly getting a poor press

Poor Richard Branson. Little more than two weeks ago he was basking in the glory of his courtroom victory over Guy Snowden of the national lottery – another triumph for Britain's best known and, according to the surveys, most admired businessman. Now everyone seems to be ganging up on him again, and this time the attack isn't led from the front, as it was five years ago, by his old bete noire, British Airways.

Both the *Economist* and the *Spectator* have this week challenged the financial credibility of Mr Branson's burgeoning business empire. *Panorama* has broadcast a knocking programme about Virgin Trains, his Channel Tunnel Rail Link consortium has collapsed, and there is a growing whispering campaign against him in the City.

What's going on? Is the Virgin empire really in difficulty? Or is this simply another case of Britain's penchant for doing down successful entrepreneurs, a symptom of our generally anti-business media and culture. Or perhaps this is just Mr Branson falling victim to his turbo-charged publicity machine. Those that court the limelight should not be too surprised when journalists and others start critically nosing around in their affairs.

Neither of the two magazine pieces told us anything we didn't already know about Virgin, or at least suspect. The *Spectator* article was, in any case, largely inaccurate polemic. Certainly it is common knowledge in the City that none of the Branson empire outside Virgin

Atlantic makes much money, but then because many of these businesses are still in their start-up phase, that hardly comes as a great surprise.

It is also generally known that Mr Branson hides the secrets of his finances behind a cloak of secretive offshore holding companies. Again, this is not uncommon among billionaires. By the same token, it is also entirely reasonable in such circumstances to ask, why the mystery? Could he be hiding something?

Even so, Mr Branson does not, on the face of it, seem to be in any more trouble financially now than he's ever been. In fact, he insists, with cash generation at more than £150m a year, the Virgin group has rarely been as healthy. At most all his new ventures are externally financed by strong outside partners. Even the much and deservedly maligned Virgin Trains is claimed to be ahead of budget and on schedule for a stock market float this summer.

Financially then, the true position seems to be the very reverse of what is suggested, so much so that Mr Branson can confidently plan for many of his businesses to be listed over the next few years in London and elsewhere. But even if this were not the case, even if the empire were on the brink, does it actually matter to anyone other than Mr Branson, his partners, bankers, creditors and employees? Probably not. Because Mr Branson's is a privately owned and run empire, there aren't any shareholders potentially disadvantaged or deceived by his secrecy.

Moreover, the present absence of dividend-demanding outside shareholders to answer to

may enable Mr Branson to take a longer-term view on investment and growth than would be possible for a publicly listed company. This, in any case, is what Mr Branson claimed in the late 1980s, when after an unhappy few years as a publicly quoted company he took his interests private once more. Certainly, he would be unable as a single publicly quoted company to engage in the same range and diversity of entrepreneurial activity and start-ups.

So why the knocking copy? One possibility which shouldn't be entirely discounted is that this is just more dirty tricks – competitors trying to undermine him. It happened once before, with British Airways, so it could happen again with some of the other entrenched monopolists offended by Mr Branson's combative business ventures and style. Both Pepsi and Coke have a powerful interest in doing him down, as does Camelot, and the big high street banks with Virgin Direct. All these companies will be smiling broadly about Mr Branson's bad press, even if they didn't initiate it.

But actually, all this has probably got much more to do with the fascination of Mr Branson and his astonishing success than anything else. In his relatively short business career Mr Branson has managed to create one of Britain's most widely recognised brands internationally. The only one I can think of which might come close is, ironically, British Airways.

Behind it all, however, lies a business em-

pire of surprisingly little substance. That's not to say Virgin is small or insignificant in business terms. Plainly it is not. But set against the extraordinary reputation and presence Virgin has achieved both domestically and internationally, there's not a lot there. As the *Economist* tells us, moreover, much of it is loss-making. If Mr Branson succeeds, he will over the next 10 years correct that position. The size of the business and its profitability will begin to match the fame of the brand.

This is the reverse of how most companies achieve reputation and brand recognition. Usually brand awareness stems from a particularly desirable and innovative product. In Virgin's case it seems to be the other way round. The name has a power and persona all of its own, which Mr Branson and his partners are using to target the soft underbelly of entrenched monopolies operating across a range of commodity products and services.

There's nothing unique in this approach. Mr Branson has compared it to the *lebensraum* and *chaebols* of the Far East – linked families of companies operating across a range of different industries – but there are some parallels in the West too. For instance, Nike is attempting to use its hugely powerful sports apparel brand to force its way into related but until recently quite separate areas of the market like sports equipment.

In Virgin's case, part of the reason for this brand-first, product-later approach is historic.

The brand originally grew out of Mr Branson's activities in the music industry, which were sold to EMI in 1992. Mr Branson's career since then has been devoted both to nurturing and developing the Virgin image, and to finding new businesses in which to exploit it. The only obvious failure so far has been with Virgin Trains, whose poor service quality has begun seriously to detract from the Virgin image elsewhere.

Most of these problems appear to have been inherited from British Rail, but enough of them are of Virgin's own making as to raise doubts about the quality of management more generally. Even so, none of this seems to me to warrant a blanket debunking of Mr Branson. When the first to pick up the pen, I will be among the first to pick up the pen. But in truth, Mr Branson is just a clever and accomplished entrepreneur. I suspect that one of the reasons he's getting a bad press is that very human thing – that we just love to build people up to knock them down.

We also still have a tendency in Britain to mistrust business success, even when it comes from someone as apparently user-friendly as Mr Branson. For all Mrs Thatcher's efforts, she failed to shift this anti-business undercurrent in British culture. The fact that Mr Branson has done so much himself to change perceptions, and make entrepreneurship something British people aspire to once more, is in itself an admirable thing.

Albert Fisher shares slump 20 per cent on profits warning

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

THE TROUBLES at the food group Albert Fisher deepened yesterday when the company issued yet another profits warning, forcing the shares down to their lowest level since 1982.

The shares slumped 20 per cent to 26p when the company said its first-half profits would be lower than last year because of the strength of sterling and poor trading at its fresh produce and North American divisions. In a further blow to investors, the potential buyer of the group's seafood operations has walked away, meaning the company will now be able to return only limited funds to shareholders. Albert Fisher had hoped to sell the seafood business for around £100m.

Although talks had reached their final stages, the terms were affected by the current ban on imports of prawns from India. Albert Fisher is now expected to cut its dividend, which currently yields more than 14 per cent. Analysts said the group could become a bid target again, either from an opportunistic financial buyer or from Chiquita, the American banana

group which pulled out of bid talks last year.

One analyst said: "I am speechless. What can you say about this company? Stephen Walls has been a disaster and his position had become untenable."

Mr Walls, the executive chairman who has failed to turn Albert Fisher around after five years, has stepped back to the position of non-executive chairman. He will receive an annual remuneration of £110,000 for just four or five days a month. "That is a disgrace," said one analyst. "His tenure has been a disaster and he should have walked."

Albert Fisher shares have underperformed the market by more than 80 per cent since

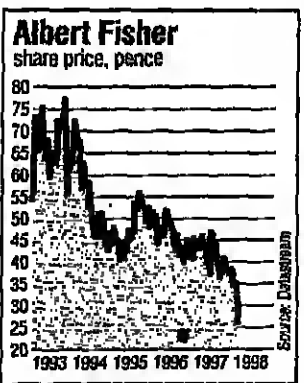
Mr Walls took over the executive chairmanship five years ago. He had intended to stay on until the sale of the seafood business had been completed along with the share buy-back.

Neil England, who took over as chief executive a year ago, said: "It has been disappointing but the strategy remains unchanged – to move away from commodity ranges and towards higher-margin, added-value products and to spread risk while improving the quality of the management."

He denied the company was past saving. "Absolutely not. It can definitely be turned around, though some parts will take longer than others."

Analysts have reduced full-year profit forecasts from £42m to £34m. The fresh produce division has been hit by higher than expected start-up costs of a new citrus venture in Uruguay. Its north American operations have been undergoing big management and operational changes and markets have been hit by high raw material prices.

Ian Quinlan, finance director, has been made chairman of the group's north US operations and will spend much of his time there.



City 'biker' adds yet another string to his bow



Sir Adam Ridley, a keen violin player and motorbike rider, has joined the board of Leopold Joseph, the independent merchant bank. Sir Adam is better known in the City as chairman of the Equitas Trust and a member of the Council of Lloyd's, as well as being deputy chairman of the National Lottery Charities Board. He was a director of another merchant bank, Hambros Bank, from 1985 to 1997. Sir Adam, 55, was a special adviser to two Chancellors of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson and Sir Geoffrey Howe, and an economist at the central Policy Review Staff at No 10 Downing Street and at the Treasury. Educated at Eton and Oxford, Sir Adam has been chairman of Strauss Turnbull and a director of the 'Sunday Correspondent', as well as leading a host of other initiatives.

BDB snubs Murdoch in set-top box deal

BRITISH Digital Broadcasting (BDB), the terrestrial television group, tempted the wrath of pay TV giant BSkyB yesterday by awarding a key digital television technology contract to a Franco-German rival group. BDB said it had awarded the deal to supply the technology used in set-top boxes to unscramble digital signals to SECA rather than News Datacom, which, like BSkyB, is a unit of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. BDB said it had chosen the group partly because its conditional access system was already in use in more than 1.5 million set-top boxes across Europe. BSkyB declined to comment despite reports that the broadcaster was preparing legal action against BDB.

Surge in CWC connections

CABLE & Wireless Communications revealed a 42 per cent surge in the number of directly connected telephone customers to 901,000 between October and December, up from 636,000 compared to the same period a year earlier. The increase follows a £50m advertising campaign by the group, created through last year's merger of Mercury Communications with three cable operators. Some 24 per cent of homes passed by CWC cables have now switched to the telephony offering, up from 21.7 per cent.

Northern buys milk supplier

NORTHERN Foods has bought Woodgate Dairies, which supplies milk to supermarkets and smaller retail outlets, for £17m in cash. Woodgate, based in Uckfield, East Sussex, had a turnover of £64m and made an operating profit of £3.2m in 1997. Northern said it intended to retain and develop the Uckfield facility as part of its Express Dairies Major Retail business. This business will become part of Express Dairies on completion of the proposed demerger of Northern's dairy business.

Drug group's shares plunge

SHARES in Core Group plunged by almost 40 per cent after the drug development company said two major drug products faced delays in testing. The company, which raised £23m in an initial public offering at 250p a share last March, said regulatory concerns prompted it to expand the scope of a clinical trial programme for Moraxen, a morphine-based pain killer for terminally ill patients. Shares closed at 118.5p, down 76.5p.

GEC borrows in euros

GEC, the defence electronics group, yesterday said it had mandated eight banks to arrange a landmark 6 billion euro syndicated loan. GEC said it had instructed the banks to arrange and underwrite 6 billion euro of standby revolving credit facilities, which it said demonstrated GEC's "strong commitment to the European economy".

AEA buys Nycomed unit

AEA Technology, the nuclear waste and environmental clean-up company, is buying a unit of Anglo-Norwegian medical company Nycomed Amersham for £16.5m. Nycomed Amersham's Industrial Quality and Safety Assurance unit made a loss of £1.6m for the six months to 30 September. AEA will pay £12.5m in cash and assume £4m liabilities for the unit.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Available Telephony (Q)	8.22m (6.30m)	-6.70m (0.307m)	-12.2p (-1.7p)	
Radio label (Q)	20.13m (18.20m)	1.81m (0.937m)	12.8p (6.3p)	nil
Rank Group (Q)	2.01m (2.00m)	260.0m (65.0m)	26.6p (24.1p)	18.0p

(Q) - Final (Q) - Interim (Q) - Nine months

Rank defies critics with upbeat results

By Andrew Yates

RANK, the Odeon to Butlins leisure conglomerate, yesterday claimed to be on the road to recovery after an awful few years which saw its share price plunge to new depths.

Rank defied its growing band of critics by announcing better than expected 1997 results. The group pleased investors by unveiling a rise in underlying pre-tax profits to £503m (£297m) and a 10 per cent jump in earnings per share, causing the shares to rise 9p to 340p.

Andrew Yates, Rank's embattled chief executive, said yesterday: "We are seeing the green shoots of recovery. Our

large investment programme is starting to work. It has been a huge job to get it right."

Mr Yates denied that he was facing a management revolt in the wake of the departure of John Garret, head of the group's leisure business, and claimed there would be no further high-profile boardroom casualties. "The board are 100 per cent behind our strategy. The morale is good and our managers are very motivated."

Analysts pointed out that Mr Yates still had a lot of work to do to prove his reforms would be successful. Mark Finnie, leisure analyst at NatWest Securities, said: "There is a glimmer of light at

the end of the tunnel. There are still plenty of questions unanswered but they have bought themselves more time."

Rank's star performer was the Odeon cinema chain, where profits and attendances rose by more than a quarter thanks to films such as *The Full Monty*, which gave the industry its best year since 1974.

The buoyant British film industry has also prompted Rank to give Pinewood Studios a £10m facility to increase its capacity by 30 per cent.

Rank is planning to accelerate the expansion of its Hard Rock Café chain. Yesterday it announced a deal with a US drinks group to produce a Hard Rock beer which will be

launched this spring. The Hard Rock record label, which has sold 120,000 albums in five months will be expanded. Rank is also looking to open 11 new Mecca bingo sites this year, which suggests it is unlikely to buy First Leisure's troubled bingo division.

But the US holiday business had another disappointing performance, as did Tom Copleigh, which suffered from prolonged delays in new openings.

Rank signalled it was unlikely to launch another share buy-back this year.

The group confirmed it was unlikely to sell any other divisions and would concentrate on revitalising some of its tired brands.

Consumer confidence still higher than normal despite slight dip

CONSUMER confidence dipped slightly this month but remains at an unusually high level. Consumers have become slightly gloomier about the economic situation but they are still upbeat about the attractiveness of making major purchases, writes Diane Cople.

The confidence index from the monthly survey carried out for the European Commission – a reasonably close guide to future growth in consumer spending – edged lower than January's level and is now some way below its midsummer peak. However, it stayed well above the long-term average, with the component indicating willing-

ness to buy big-ticket items remaining close to its recent peak.

Separately, a comparison of the whole gamut of monthly business surveys published yesterday by Merrill Lynch suggested that activity in the economy is probably stronger than official figures suggest.

For the final quarter of last year the official figures showed manufacturing output declining and growth in GDP slowing noticeably. However, business surveys all showed an increase in manufacturing production.

Ian Stewart, UK economist at Merrill Lynch, said there was a clear risk of upward revisions for the latter part of 1997.

WHO'S SUING WHO

JOHN WILLCOCK



A COMPANY owned by Harrods boss Mohamed Al Fayed is suing Heathrow Airport over the number of air landing "slots" allocated to aircraft likely to use the company's Executive Jet Centre at the airport.

A couple of years ago the Harrods group bought Hunting Business Aviation from Hunting Plc, and renamed it Metro Business Aviation.

Last week Metro Business Aviation issued a writ against Heathrow Airport claiming damages over the number of short term slots allocated to the kind of air traffic which would use the Executive Jet Centre. The Centre is a maintenance depot which Metro has leased from the airport on the South-east Perimeter Road, Heathrow, since November 1995.

Metro agreed to pay renton the Centre of £788,000 to Heathrow for the year to 30 November 1997, and then £1,075,000 a year until the 30 November 2002.

Metro was intending to use the Centre to provide engineering services to aircraft,

such as overhaul and maintenance. Metro is claiming that after it had signed the lease for the Centre with Heathrow in 1995 Heathrow changed its policy about providing slots for the type of aircraft that might use the centre.

Metro's writ says: "The best estimate that the plaintiff can presently give is that by virtue of the existence and implementation of the defendant's policy by the end of 1997 approximately 20 per cent fewer aircraft were using the plaintiff's services than in 1995."

Metro's solicitors Davenport Lyons conclude that "the defendant has derogated from its grant." Mr Fayed's company is seeking damages and costs.

NORTHERN & SHELL, the publishing group run by chairman Richard Desmond, is suing News Group Newspapers, publisher of *The Sun*, over an article about Paula Yates in the 14th February paper headed "PAULA: I WILL NEVER TALK TO GELDOF AGAIN".

Northern & Shell, whose titles include *OK! Magazine*, *Penthouse* and *Asian Babes*, is seeking an injunction to restrain News Group "from further infringing the plaintiff's copyright by publishing or authorising to be published in 'The Sun' or otherwise any substantial part of an article headed 'Paula Yates World Exclusive' published in issue 98 of *OK! Magazine* dated 20th February on the front cover and pages 22 to 43 inclusive and offered for sale on 14th February 1998."

Mr Desmond's company is also seeking damages for infringement of copyright, damages for libel, and damages for slander "published by an employee of the defendant namely Andrew Coulson, acting in the course of his employment during a telephone conversation...on 14th February 1998."

Mr Coulson is editor of *The Sun's* "Bizarre" showbiz gossip column. The lawyers acting for Northern & Shell are Wiggin & Co of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

ROVER GROUP is suing Innocenti Cooper Cars Ltd of Bexley, Kent, and a director of the same company, Michael Fernando, over use of the famous "Mini Cooper" name.

Back in the 'sixties the Italian firm Innocenti built a luxury version of the Rover Mini under license in Turin for the Italian market. Now Rover Group is trying to prevent a separate UK company, Innocenti Cooper Cars, from "passing off" cars under Rover group registered trade marks. Rover is also seeking an injunction to stop the company from using the names "Mini Cooper", "Innocenti Mini Cooper", or "Innocenti Cooper."

Rover's writ, issued in the High Court last Monday, also demands that the defendants should disclose on Oath the number of cars in their possession which would come under the terms of the injunction, and the amount of money received as a result of their trade in such cars.

Rover has retained solicitors Martineau Johnson to pursue the case.

I CAME across a blast from the past in the Chancery writ room in the High Court this week, unearthing a writ which last week was transferred in from the courts in Manchester.

It is the original writ issued four years ago by 198 investors against Grief Middleton, the private client stockbroker, over an Enterprise Zone Trust sponsored by the firm that went sour in the early 1990s.

The investors included one Paul "Gazza" Gascoigne, a well known footballer, who invested £25,000 in the London Docklands property scheme.

The losses suffered by investors led to the Securities and Futures Authority levying a fine of £100,000, its heaviest ever, against Grief Middleton.

Last September Grief Middleton settled with the investors for an undisclosed sum. Quite why the writ has resurfaced in the London High Court, now that the whole thing is settled, is one of those strange foibles of the British system of justice.

Fashion week's fanfare for young Britain in Europe

By Tamsin Blanchard
Fashion Editor

LONDON Fashion Week fanfared its grand opening last night with a little help from the Foreign Office. Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and Doug Henderson, minister for Europe, were due for a glamorous night out with the fashion pack, although many of the British designers invited to the European Young Designers Fashion Show were unable to attend. They were too busy with last-minute preparations for their shows which kick off officially this morning with Elspeth Gibson's first catwalk show.

"The UK's presidency of the European Union gives us an opportunity to promote what is great about Europe," said Tony Blair. "Our connections with the rest of Europe are not just about trade and markets, but also about stimulating cultural and artistic exchange."

The show last night was held to celebrate the presidency of the European Union, with young designers from each of the member countries invited to show on the catwalk. It was a unique event - a fashionable version of the Eurovision Song Contest except that everyone last night was a winner. Representing the United Kingdom were Julien Macdonald, Matthew Williamson, and Seraph, the New Generation designers sponsored by Marks & Spencer last season.

Macdonald graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1996 and sold his graduation collection to the Knightsbridge store, A La Mode. He shows his third collection on Tuesday night and continues to design knitwear for Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel.

Williamson's first catwalk collection last September made a splash with just 11 outfits. He has been heralded as one of London's most commercial talents and already sells to A La Mode and Joseph in London. Both

Williamson and Macdonald will continue to be sponsored by Marks & Spencer for their shows this week. The sponsorship scheme was launched in 1993 and has helped Alexander McQueen, Antonio Berardi and Clements Ribeiro.

Seraph is designed by Sherald Lamden, 34, who used to work for Banya Sarne's Ghost. Seraph sells to Liberty and Selfridges, as well as stores in Boston, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. As with most of Britain's young fashion talent, Seraph is very dependent on export sales, with about 60 per cent of business overseas. Shows from the rest of Europe included French labels, Eric Berge and Veronique Leroy.

Whether the Government's dress sense will benefit from the event remains to be seen, although the Cabinet already boasts designer labels such as Oswald Boateng (tailor of choice for Peter Mandelson, minister without portfolio) and Timothy Everest (worn by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown) which is probably about two more than any previous cabinet. Paul Smith, a member of the Government's culture and media task force, is another new Labour favourite.

Chris Smith admitted yesterday that: "I'm wearing a boring old M&S suit because I've come straight from the office." But, he added, "My tie is by Oswald Boateng." Pressed as to the other designer names in his wardrobe, he said he also has ties by Paul Smith.

Deborah Milner, Paul Smith, and Tristan Webber have been given slots for the first time on the five-day official schedule. And there are the new names who have been enterprising enough to find sponsorship and put on their own shows. Yesterday, four newcomers included Scott Henshall, a 22-year-old graduate from the University of Northumbria. His label, Made in England, promises to cash in on the concept of Cool Britannia. The name alone will ensure a following in Japan and the United States.



Young Britons on the European catwalk: Opening London Fashion Week last night were (main picture and above) Sherald Lamden, who designs for the Seraph label; a Julien Macdonald (below) who shows his third collection on Tuesday; and Matthew Williamson (bottom), hailed as one of London's most commercial talents

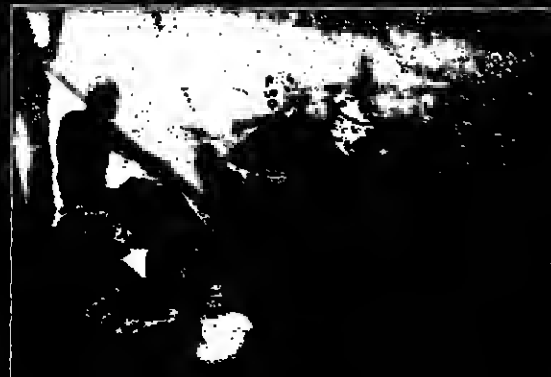
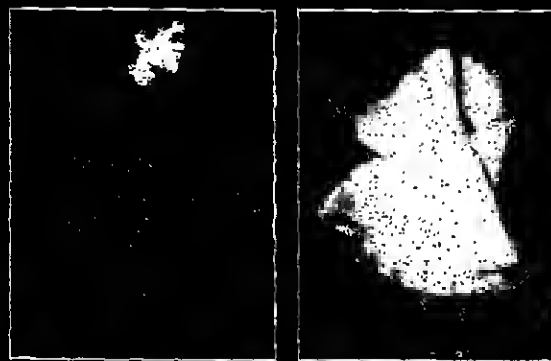


Main picture: Honor Fraser

The Independent

fashion

Spring 98 special



Art and fashion are having a fling. Our 48-page fashion special gets you up to date with the latest from both worlds. Sarah Moon photographs this spring's newest looks in the spirit of the season's muse, Frida Kahlo. Go behind the scenes with Vivienne Westwood as she explains the inspiration behind her new advertising campaign. And see exclusive pictures by Richard Billingham, star of the Royal Academy's Sensation show.



fashion fashion

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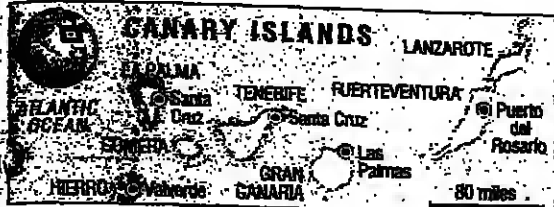
TIME OFF

TRAVEL, LEISURE & SPORT

Saturday 21 February 1998

هكذا من الأصل

Adrift in the Atlantic



Marooned somewhere between the Sahara and South America, it's easy to lose yourself in La Palma, writes Simon Calder

You cling to the edge of the known world, feeling like a player in the most hellish Wagnerian drama. Above, dark anvil-like clouds hammer against each other as they jostle for the privilege of drenching the tourist. Below, the steep Atlantic reaches the end of its unfettered run from the Americas by crashing angrily against impassively mighty rocks. Any minute now, you fear, the volcano that sprouts from the centre of La Palma is going to want to join in. Better get back to the bar. Luckily, there is a nearby scattering of spruce pastel dwellings beneath sturdy red roofs that remind you that you are still adjacent to civilisation. Hispanic style.

Whatever universe this island occupies, it has extraordinary properties. Often, you cannot tell when the ocean ends and the heavens begin, nor where the molten lead of the surf transmits to the solidified lava of the shore, nor identify the point at which the rocky terrain melts to a weary farm building. Land, sea and sky; nature and artifice – these merge together miraculously in Isla de La Palma, a forgotten little sister of the Canaries.

Imagine that a geological cataclysm has bestowed the Isle of Wight with a string of 7,000ft mountains, arranged in the manner of a question-mark through the centre of the island. The remodelled isle is then transported to a point 150 miles west of the Sahara, the furthest-flung of a family of seven. You can't get much more marginal than that. The second-smallest of the Canary Islands hangs to the volcanic skirts of its larger, more popular siblings. La Palma feels cast adrift – which, for the visitor, is a wonderfully liberating feeling.

But first, you need to get there. You know the feeling when a journey has been such an ordeal that you just know you're not going to enjoy the destination? That was how I arrived in La Palma. You can't fly direct from Britain – which, say some, is part of its charm. So I flew from Gatwick to Tenerife's southern airport, and tried to connect with a flight departing from the northern airport.

After a horribly early start, a couple of cancelled husbands and a £40 taxi ride, when I finally boarded the (inevitably delayed) plane to the island, I was fully expecting La Palma would feel more like a stress-related illness than a paradise island.

The final approach sorted that out. The pilot came in from the north, providing a splendid flypast of an island that seemed to protrude from the sea like a giant, ragged emerald. A sharp U-turn swung us around for the landing, on a runway that sticks out from the side of La Palma in the manner usually reserved for aircraft carriers. This was clearly no ordinary island.

"Next time, you may want to take a taxi," smiled Gregorio as I climbed out of the car. He handed me a card that showed he was an off-duty cab driver. By day two, the unexpected drain on my finances had left me in no position to take taxis around the island, and I was blithely (embarrassingly successfully) to supplement the sparse bus service around the island.

The buses, though rare, are cheap and reliable: between the capital, Santa Cruz, and the second town, Los Llanos, the cost is £2. The thousands of migratory birds that pause here would cover the journey in eight miles, but by tortuous road the trip takes more than an hour. If you want to make a success of a career selling power steering, set up in La Palma. The airport runway is the only straight stretch of tarmac on the island.

You soon get the hang of knowing instantly where you are with a single glance. Windswept plains tumbling into

the sea means Wagner country, the exposed west coast. More sheltered and gentle terrain, with the grey outlines of Tenerife and La Gomera rising offshore like whales, implies the east coast. And when you can't see beyond the end of your nose, you must be in the mountains.

La Palma's catchline is "The Green Island". In tourist-speak, "green" invariably means "wet". Bearing the brunt of 3,000 miles of Atlantic Ocean makes La Palma the dampest of the Canaries. Even if it's not raining at sea level, you can easily go upwards and check in to a cloud. I spent considerable time trying to reach the various miradores recommended as affording the finest views. But those argumentative clouds always came along for the ride, and I would return to Santa Cruz for the company of humans rather than cumulus.

La Palma has fewer people than the Isle of Wight, with just 80,000 inhabitants – a number exceeded on most days by tourists in neighbouring Tenerife. There are occasional charter flights from Germany, but as a tourist you are a relatively rare species in La Palma. So expect a more than usually generous welcome.

And once you start talking to people, you realise that you're not in Spain at all. For a start, the language has a winningly lazy pronunciation, with none of the Castilian lisp. The suspicion that in fact you're on a misplaced speck of South America is increased when you leaf through the Canary Islands newspaper. Each of the seven islands is covered in turn, all the way down to the toddlers of La Palma and neighbouring Hierro.

The next page is marked "La Octava Isla" – the eighth island – and shows a map of Venezuela.

Since 1492, the Canaries have been part of the New World, spiritually rather than geographically. You can fly direct to Caracas and Havana, the two cities with the largest Canarian communities. And towns like Santa Cruz de La Palma have picked up Latinesque touches, like the exquisitely elaborate galleries ambitiously applied to tall, handsome homes. A main street is named, in the Latin manner, after an obscure Irish adventurer: O'Daly (in Spanish-speaking America, O'Higgins and O'Reilly get namechecks). A replica of the Santa Maria, Columbus's vessel of discovery, is the closest that La Palma gets to a tacky tourist attraction. Walking around Santa Cruz is like rambling through a version of Old Havana where things actually work. There is an energy, an intensity, that you rarely find outside the inner core of Latin American capitals.

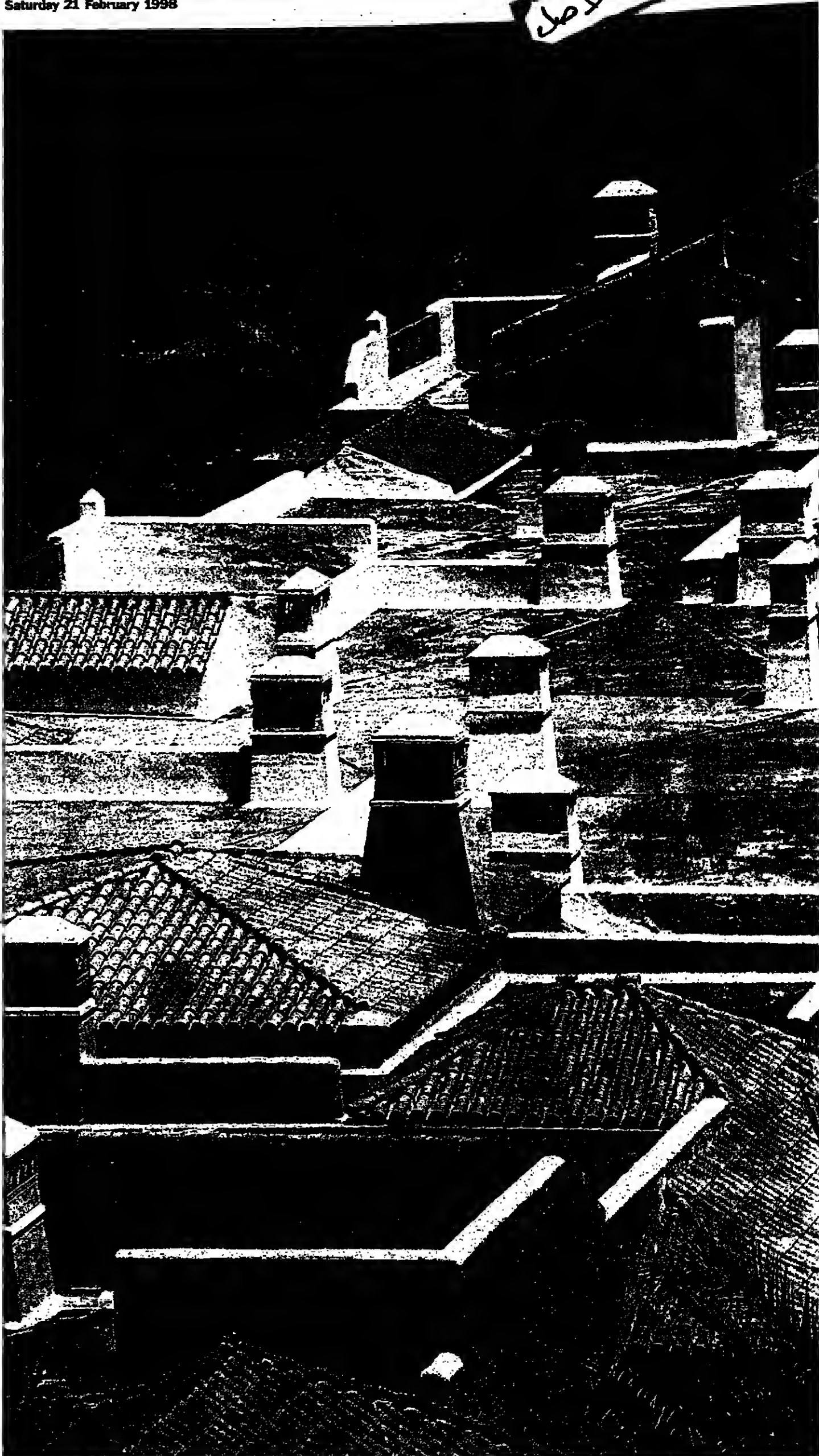
The wayward vibrance of La Palma is easier to reach than any of these distant lands. But only just.

Getting there

The easiest way to reach the island is on a charter flight to Las Palmas, changing to a local flight or ferry. Simon Calder paid £230 for a five-day holiday in Tenerife with Thomson, including charter flights from Gatwick; he travelled on to La Palma on a flight operated by the airline Binter, which has frequent links between the Canary Islands. Fares, though, are high: the one-way ticket cost £40. The inter-island ferries are much cheaper; he sailed back to Tenerife for £10, including a berth. To hire Gregorio Diaz's taxi, dial 44 44 62.

More information

The best books about La Palma are the East and West Walking Guides by David and Ros Brown. Spanish Tourist Office, 22-23 Manchester Square, London W1M 5AP (0171-486 8077; brochure-line 0891 669920).



Between the desert and the deep blue sea: La Palma is the most remote of the Canary Islands

Photograph: Nik Wheeler

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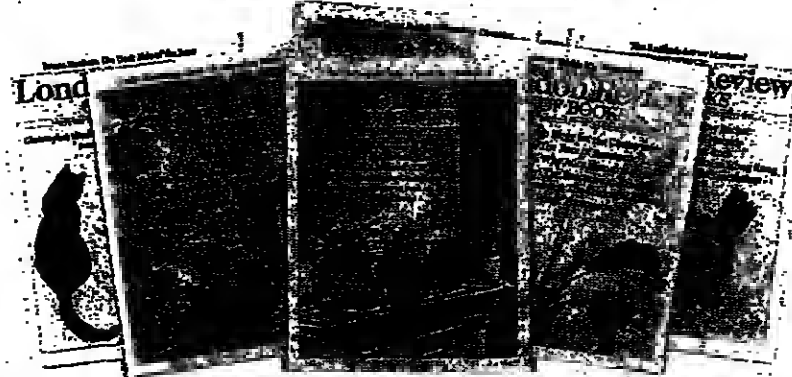
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London Review OF BOOKS
ENGAGING THE MIND

An isthmus tale

From the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean on the Tehuantepec line, with Hugh O'Shaughnessy



Weetman Pearson's legacy: scenes from the Tehuantepec line, above and below

Photograph: Bossemeyer/Bilderberg/Network

It's a bargain that no serious traveller can turn down: a day-long train journey from the Atlantic to the Pacific with interesting travelling companions, traversing swamps, jungles and mountains, with a chance of observing Mexico unvarnished and at first hand, for the equivalent of £3.50. The service includes newspapers and a series of exotic dishes and fresh fruit brought to your seat.

The Tehuantepec line, which was built in the 1890s by Weetman Pearson, later a British MP, goes from the Caribbean port of Coatzacoalcas due south to Salina Cruz on the Pacific. It has more to offer than

Pajaritos, a tropical Rotterdam whose lights and pipes were winking at us from across the water.

As I prompted, he dimly recalled the name of Weetman Pearson, later Lord Cowdray, engineer, oil man and founder of the Pearson empire - owner of the *Financial Times* - who came to this town to put it on the map and make money. "He laid out Coatzacoalcas and did it very well, you know. He was a good planner," said Rafael.

Pearson, a Huddersfield man who was a genius at working out costings, arrived in 1896, having earned his fame by giving Mexico City, which was often under threat

connection between the US East Coast and California, and was gratefully used by the Hawaiian cane farmers to get their sugar to New York.

Given the violence and robbery that is sweeping the country, and the horror stories that are commonplace in the capital, I asked Rafael before we parted what precautions I should take against cut-throats on the train the next morning. He laughed. "There aren't any robbers on that train. The people who use it are so poor, they've got nothing to steal. No one goes round this country stealing goats and chickens."

Get to Coatzacoalcas any morning of the week at 6am, pay your 42 pesos and 50 cents at the cobwebbed ticket office which still contains some of Pearson's original office furniture, then walk a short way up the track to two rickety carriages. These are stuck behind a few motley goods wagons, the whole brought up with a yellow caboose with two little lookout towers on the roof. You heave yourself aboard, and in the dark take your pick of battered seats. Before the diesel growls into life, a boy has come round with the morning's *Diario del Istmo*.

Dead on 6.05am our train, half-filled with passengers, set off on the 302-kilometre journey to the Pacific, which was scheduled to take nine hours. I'd taken the precaution before leaving my hotel of vigorously emptying bowels and bladder, a sound idea given the smell coming out of the lavatory compartments. I had also brought food and water, though in view of what we were about to be offered, that was not so vital.

In the marshy meadows the horses were just beginning work, and children were playing round their palm-thatched huts. The maize fields were starting to show up green. Suddenly the carriage was filled with fresh and noisy young people in their Sunday best. "We're Seventh Day Adventists going to pray," said the girl who sat opposite me. "And that's our leader," she added, pointing

to a fat young woman in Girl Guide uniform, sitting across the aisle. She simpered. Everybody seemed to be enjoying the journey for the simple reason that that is what trains are about.

As we began to climb out of the swamp more industry appeared, a sulphur works with acres of yellow mineral tipped on to the sidings, then a cement works, spotlessly clean and obviously managed with fearsome efficiency.

The young Adventists alighted at a halt as rapidly as they had arrived. They were replaced by a swarm of boys and women selling tacos, enchiladas, soft drinks, sweets, empanadas, bananas, oranges, and egg custards in little pots sprinkled with cinnamon. The fruit had been picked minutes before from trees that line the track. It is a well-rehearsed operation. The sellers all get on at the same station and alight half an hour later. I couldn't discover how they got home. They would have had to wait hours for the train in the opposite direction.

Then Fausto boarded. Only on the Tehuantepec railway could I have met Fausto. He is a 77-year-old Zapotec with a head such as you see carved in hundreds of prehistoric sites hereabouts. He had long since retired from his job as a telegraphist on the line; he showed me his rail pass with pride, and demonstrated that his wrist had lost none of its suppleness. His grandfather had worked on building the line, and he knew that "un inglés" had engineered it. Mexican railways weren't a patch on what they had been, he sighed. The sleeper from Mexico City to Mérida in the Yucatan was no more. The express had been abolished, as a poverty-stricken system was put up for privatisation. He tut-tutted as we passed ruined baths where he had once tapped out his message, but his eyes lit up when we came to Itepec, where the station buildings were still in good condition, with a plaque bearing the date 1911.

As we rumbled along, he taught

me polite phrases in Zapotec, over a fresh orange cut in half and flavoured the Mexican way with salt and chilli. Then talk turned to how Tony Blair was doing.

At Matías Romero we stopped, 90 kilometres short of our destination. I strolled on to the platform, looked at a 100-year-old steam monster silent beside the platform, and chatted to the engineers. "The locomotive needs changing. It wasn't pulling," they explained.

I reported back to Fausto. "Don't you believe it. It's Sunday; no one much is travelling and the crew could do with two hours' overtime," said my Zapotec friend

a brace of fine white chickens.

Then we came out of the mountains and into the Pacific plain. Just short of Salina Cruz, the train stopped. No railway building, no platform, just a rusty iron sign in the wilderness with the single word "Pearson". Weetman Pearson's jetties are still to be seen at Salina Cruz, hemmed in now by a container port and Mexico's largest oil refinery a mile or two down the coast. I went into town and thought of the contractor over a couple of glasses of orange juice at a bar called the Hawaii.

Rumours abound that the Mexican and US governments are preparing plans to develop a shiny



most of the world's railways but it makes its demands, and they include tolerance and patience.

I spent the evening before my journey in a style Graham Greene, who passed this way in the Eighties, would have envied. I drank coffee on the quayside with Rafael, the ferry superintendent, as he told me of his unpublished novel about the supreme wickedness of God. As he talked, he kept one eye on the vessel with its cargo of lorries, cars and passengers, watching its captain guiding it, in the gloom between the tugs and the supertankers, the kilometre across the black, deep Coatzacoalcas river. There are four ports on the river, which serve the giant oil refineries at Minatitlán and

putrid water for months on end, a decent drainage system. He had also constructed a real port at Veracruz, a thing that the Spaniards had never been able to do in colonial times. The Thatcher-like Mexican president of the day admired him, and got him to sort out an existing jerry-built line and construct the ports at each end which would make the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the second narrowest corridor on the American continent, a serious commercial rival for the Panama Canal that was being built at the time.

Pearson completed the railway, and it is in use to this day - though no longer as vital or as profitable as in the time when it was the quickest

MAKING FOR MEXICO

Outward bound: there has never been such an excellent range of flights to Mexico, such low fares, and so many stopover possibilities. The best deals we have tracked down this week are as follows:

Non-stop: British Airways to Mexico City from Gatwick (switching to Heathrow from the end of March). Through Trailfinders (0171-938 3366) you will pay £389 (including tax) until the end of March and between 11-30 April. You must stay at least a week and no more than six months. You can change the date of the return flight once, in Mexico, for a charge of £75. Children under 12 pay half fare.

Via the US: from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham and Manchester, through Quest Worldwide (0181-546 6000) you pay £369 for a Virgin Atlantic Continental flight via a city such as New York (Newark) or Houston. The fare is available until 31 March and between 14-30 April. You must stay at least one Saturday night, and a maximum of one month. The child fare is half-price, if two adults are travelling together. A similar deal is available on American Airlines through discount agencies. With this fare, you can change your return date once in Mexico City for a charge of \$100.

Via Amsterdam: from one of 20 points in the UK - from Aberdeen to Sheffield. £391 on KLM through Trailfinders. This is available until the end of March. You must stay between one week and three months. You can change your return date once for free once you're in Mexico.

Children travel for two-thirds of the adult fare when travelling with an adult.

Charter flights: there are now numerous charters, mainly from Manchester and Gatwick, to the Mexican resorts of Cancun and Puerto Vallarta. (Note that many of these stop to refuel en route.) Charters are mostly sold as part of package holidays, by operators such as First Choice (0161-745 7000), Airtours (0541 500479) and Thomson (0990 502580). Some flights may have space for "seat only" customers; expect to pay around £250 return to Cancun, and slightly more to Puerto Vallarta.

Getting around: specialist travel agents such as Journey Latin America (0181-747 3108) and South American Experience (0171-976 5511) can sell flight tickets both to and within Mexico; air passes on Aeromexico and Mexicana are excellent value. To reach Oaxaca from the capital, you can fly in around an hour or take a bus on a journey of about nine hours. The overnight train takes 14 hours (on a good day).

Red tape: visitors require a tourist card, which is issued free by the airline when you embark, or at the frontier if you enter by land. If you arrive by land from the US, it will be assumed that you are a day-tripper and no tourist card will be offered; you must ask for one.

More information: Mexican Ministry of Tourism, 60 Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DS (0171-734 1058). Note that this office takes a substantial siesta, closing each day from 1.30pm to 3pm.

Victoria Rees

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GREEN CHANNEL

Is it possible for travel to aid global cooling? Those ever-positive Americans have come up with a scheme that guarantees "guilt-free travel".

Agents and tour operators involved in the Global Cooling Trees for Travel scheme give customers certificates which confirm that seven trees have been planted for each traveller.

The logic is that a jet emits about 11 ounces of carbon dioxide for each passenger mile it flies, so over a 7,000-mile round trip from London to New York, every person on board will be responsible for about 5,000 pounds (more than two tons) of carbon dioxide. As a tree absorbs 50 pounds of the gas in a year, planting 10 trees will offset the carbon dioxide created during the flight over the course of 10 years.

Brits interested in the idea should link up with a tree-planting scheme in the UK, such as Woodlands Trust, which has a

"Plant a Tree for Cleaner Air" programme. You can work out how many you need to plant by following Trees for Travel's rough guidelines. They suggest planting at least one tree for every 4,000 miles travelled by plane. That tree offsets the carbon dioxide emitted by the aircraft, while two more trees would compensate for the greenhouse effect caused by the nitrogen oxide and water-vapour emissions.

Plant one tree for every 2,000 miles travelled by car, one for every 3,700 miles by train, another for every four days spent on a cruise ship and one for every 10,000 miles travelled by bus. Jet-setters should plant a tree after every 50th hour.

If we all follow this advice we might cool the planet, but Trees for Travel doesn't mention whether we'd have any land left.

Trees for Travel web-site: www.treadlightly.com; Woodlands Trust 0800 026 9650.

Sue Wheat

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High plains drifter

If the chocolate moles don't tempt you, then the Mariachis surely will. Polli Kaminski escapes to the ancient, unspoiled gem of Oaxaca

"Well" said my friend, who had lived for some time in Africa, "I have eaten hippopotamus, so why not mole?" We were skimming the menu in a Mexican restaurant. *Mole* in Mexico ("mole") is not, she was relieved to learn, a small black creature that digs up moles in the lawn, but a delicacy that originates in the city of Oaxaca (pronounced "Wahaka") in the heart of Mexico.

Streets around the main market here are crammed with *mole* shops, each selling its own style of this chocolaty, herby, spicy sauce, which is cooked up and served with chicken, turkey, beef or anything else you fancy. My favourite was a really rich plate of fried potatoes immersed in it. Once you have got over the thrill of eating really fresh tacos and mountains of guacamole with refried beans, it becomes clear that the cuisine of Mexico, while interesting in the composition of some dishes (*huevos rancheros*, for instance - fried eggs on a bed of spicy green salsa), is not blessed with infinite variety. *Mole*, which gives Mexican food that small oint of individuality, can also contribute to a person's status, as can be seen in the recipes specially

made up for important Oaxacan families. Apart from this unusual little delicacy, Oaxaca can boast of being possibly the most beautiful city in Mexico. High on the plains in the heart of Oaxaca state, 300 miles south-east of Mexico City, it shines with a light similar to that in Mediterranean cities. Combine this with the air purity peculiar to high altitude and minimal industry, and the effect is stupefying.

Oaxaca is built on a grid system similar to that of New York, but is a fraction of the size; at the end of every long, straight street the city disappears and fresh green hills rise up, leaving you with a disconcerting sense of being cut off from the world.

When the Spanish moved inland from the coast in 1520, they brought with them architecture typical of southern Europe, which can still be seen in the heart of the city. Large, ooble buildings are painted in earthy colours - sand red, ochre and stone - and adorned with wrought-iron balconies crammed with pots of trailing flowers. Through huge wooden doors, high courtyards are massed with tumbling and creeping greenery. Regal stone staircases

lead up to cool and shady rooms where quiet voices echo intriguingly.

All streets eventually lead to the *zocalo*, or main square, the heart of every city in Mexico. But Oaxaca's is different. It is bordered on one side by a flowery, Rococo-style church and on all other sides is crowded with café and restaurants, their chairs and tables laid out invitingly in the sun or tucked shyly away in the shade of arched walkways.

In lush gardens at the heart of the square looms the bandstand, a stage for the talents of earnest young people and practised adults who proudly play on Sunday afternoons and saints' days. Everyone congregates in the *zocalo*: children play, plots are laid, and business deals are negotiated in the shade of the trees.

On the borders, beggars and street urchins do their rounds of the restaurants and cafés, ostensibly selling bits of carved wood or ribbons. The best thing to do is to let them eat your tacos and salsa, and give them bread and butter from your table. Even the poorest give to the poor in Oaxaca. And poverty is here in plenty.

When darkness falls, the music starts up

and every café on the *zocalo* bursts into sound, each one offering a different style. Young people with extraordinary talent play guitars, pipes, accordions. Others sing. Whatever their chosen skill, their presence is magical, and the square becomes sadly empty when they finish for the night - usually around midnight.

When wailing and strumming starts up around the square, you know the Mariachis have arrived - groups of local players and singers, romantic buskers who invariably play quite badly and sing slightly out of tune, but have masses of charm. And, oh, those trousers... Low at the hip, flared at the foot, with silver studs from waist to ankle down

each side and silver-studded belts, they are uniform to the Mariachis but coveted by just about every female tourist in Mexico.

Close by the *zocalo* is the other centre of Oaxaca, the covered market - a place of loud voices and bright colours. Everything can be bought here, from dustbins to leather handbags, and there is a stall selling fruit and vegetable juices where you can realise your barmiest recipes: cocount and mango, carrot and guava, and more.

It would be reckless to visit Oaxaca and to miss the magnificent site of Monte Alban. Set on a hilltop about six miles from the city, it is one of the most important pre-Hispanic ruins in Mexico. It was once

the Zapotec capital, and archaeologists have dated its origins to 500BC. Most of the ruins existing today, however, date from AD300-750. The technology required to design and build such a huge complex, which housed a highly organised society, is staggering.

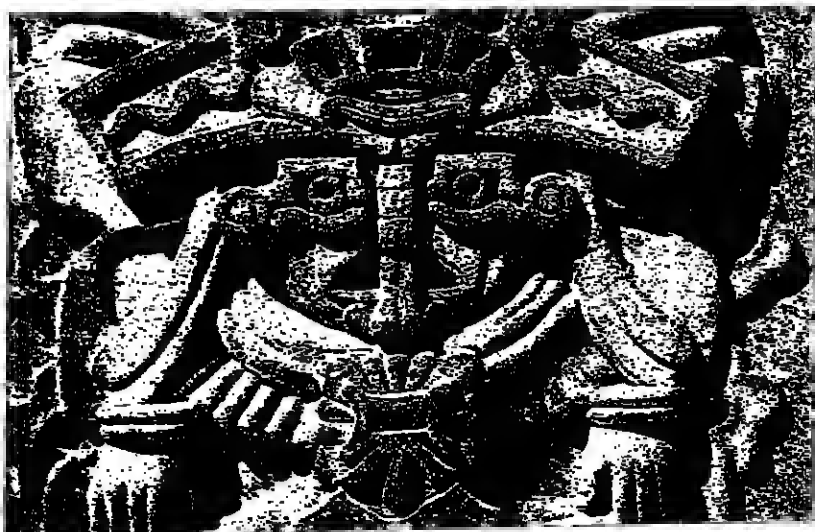
Many treasures were plundered over the centuries, but in 1932 Dr Alfonso Caso discovered Mixtec treasures that had been buried in tombs. Some of these can be seen in the modern museum at the entrance to the site. Meanwhile, if you feel like experiencing life as a true Mexican mole you can visit the vaulted burial chamber, Tumba 104.

Remains of the day: the ancient Zapotec capital of Monte Alban

Photograph: Pictures Colour Library Ltd

Viva Oaxaca, Vivaaaa!

Andrew Marshall remembers a night of 'purest uncut Mexico', high on mezcal, heady with the old revolution



A Mayan statue near Oaxaca

Photograph: Pictures Colour Library Ltd

And so it went on, late into the night, as the beers and the mezcal mounted up. In the small hours, I stumbled back to my hotel, the lavish Presidente, and crashed out.

What a place to awake. Its white-washed walls, the calm, dark, green and damp courtyards, the timbered rooms and the quiet corridors made it one of the best places I have ever nursed a hangover. I slumbered through the morning, woke only by a light earth tremor that did nothing for my composure.

I spent the afternoon wandering the dusty, drowsy streets of the city, exploring the churches and the museum dedicated to Benito Juárez. His name is little known outside Mexico, yet he is one of the founding fathers of this Byzantine state and its permanent crusade against colonialism, dependency and the church. Here, he is a secular saint of the revolution.

Graham Greene charted this territory in *The Lawless Roads*, a survey which he wrote in the Thirties on the crushing of the church in Mexico. When he visited Oaxaca, the revolution was not long past, and he painted a vivid picture of a city under virtual occupation. One large convent, he wrote, had been turned into a barracks by the army, their horses stabled in the cells and the courtyards. I discovered, with a bit of careful reading and some sleuthing, that this convent was now the hotel Presidente.

In the cathedral, which was long ago restored to worship, I admired the elaborate paintings and carved statues that go with the church in a country where the older religions have quietly fused with Catholicism. And while I was there, a woman broke into song from one of the side chapels, a song which was so beautiful I could not stop myself from seeking her out. She knelt on the floor, staging her heart out, so if she was a day, and full of fierce devotion. And though I am not religious, I could not help but recall the old saw about poor Mexico: so far from God, so close to the United States.

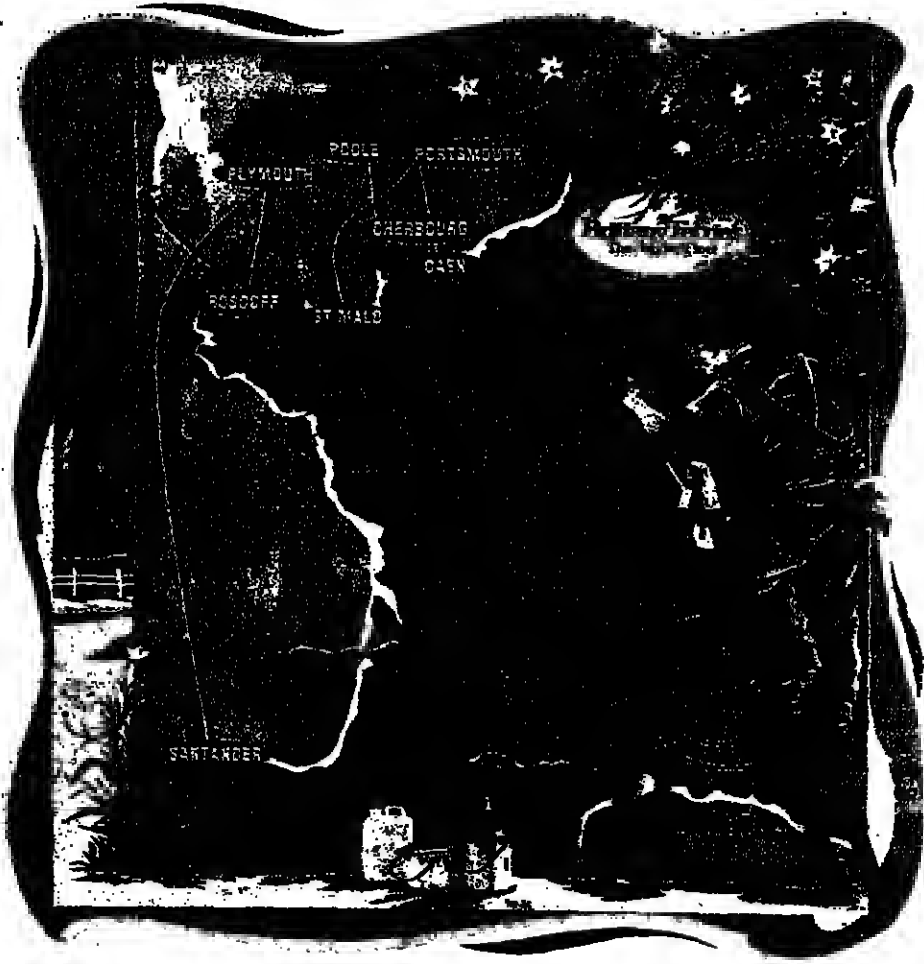
cal, the murderous spirit that has done for so many good men.

Then the officials turned up. First came the local soldiery, with rifles bigger than them, helmets slipping over their eyes, and ill-fitting uniforms. They stood around the square looking nervous, as well they might in a part of the country where the state still has only a fragile hold on parts of the countryside. Then came the more serious guys, with automatic weapons and steely-eyed stares. Lastly, the armoured cavalcade escorting the Governor poured into the square with sirens blaring.

The Governor came on to the balcony of his colonial-era palace, and launched the traditional call-and-response with the waiting crowd. "Viva Benito Juárez," he cried. And they roared back: "Viva!" "Viva el Presidente!"

"Viva!"
"Viva Mexico!"
"Vivaaaa!"

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5/SCOTLAND

Listen, but try to keep your head

Jon Winter goes on a musical tour with an undertone of violence

Anyone who imagines Scottish Highland music as a rather dreary, overly nostalgic genre should consider the content of "Ann Bròn Binn", an ancient Gaelic ballad. It recounts the tale of a chap named Arthur who succumbs to the enchanting harp-playing of a beautiful young woman, eventually falling asleep with his head in her lap. Seizing upon his vulnerability, the beautiful woman swaps her harp for a sword and, for reasons that are unclear, lops off his head. Forget All Saints and the Spice Girls, that is Girl Power.

Learning of such savagely romantic ditties is just part of the conversion that cynics undergo when they visit Balnain House in Inverness, the self-proclaimed "Home of Highland Music". Situated in a handsome Georgian mansion on the banks of the River Ness, Balnain House is not just for folk enthusiasts. Visitors of every musical orientation are invited to embark on an brief interactive, audio-visual tour of Highland music.

Your hearing is first introduced to the primitive tones of ringing rocks and droning battle horns popular around 2,000 years ago. To modern ears, these early instruments might sound harmoniously challenged, but when backed with a recording of the wind or the ocean, they combine to make extraordinarily haunting music.

Visitors then continue through a series of themed listening stations, each equipped with headphones, where a selection of tracks can be listened to as you absorb the accompanying written information.

It quickly becomes apparent that far from being inspired by quaint sentimentalities, much of the music has its roots in war, religion and the rigours of everyday life in the Highlands. One area focuses solely on work and communal songs "whose primary function was to increase work efficiency and maintain concentration by providing a steady rhythm". Plog in here and you can listen to, among others, butter churning melodies, spinning ditties and "bawling" (shrinking) tweed tunes.

For my ears, though, some of the more beguiling tunes were those from Orkney and Shetland - eerie, monastic-sounding choral singing, and jaunty fishermen's songs for attracting seals, who have for a long time been thought to respond to such music.

Although for the main part the



exhibition may seem to dwell in the past, Balnain House is no museum. In fact, any restrained museum-like ambience is likely to be kicked out by a dance class enthusiastically stamping their feet on the ceiling above you, or by the reels and jigs of an impromptu music session drifting up from the café in the basement. "Cultural centre" is perhaps a more accurate label, a viewpoint reinforced by the noticeboard in the foyer, which is crowded with advertisements for dance classes, instrument tuition, festivals, pub gigs, ceilidhs, instruments for sale and even weekend harp-making courses.

Whatever you make of a visit to Balnain House, arguably the most memorable moment for most visitors is the opportunity to test your musical talents on a number of traditional instruments (including several enchanting harps) on hand around the exhibition. Thankfully, today's visitors have little to fear from homicidal harp-players, but when a group of inquisitive tourists find the bagpipes, you just have to run for your life.

Balnain House, 40 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5HR (01463 715757). Admission: adults, £2; over-60s, students and unemployed, £1.50; children under 16, 50p. Opening times: 10am-5pm Tuesdays to Saturdays. The Shop session runs on Thursdays. The Shop contains a wide range of books, CDs, written music, instruments and other learning materials. Fresh Scottish fare, seafood and vegetarian specialities feature on the menu in Café Balnain.



Speed bonnie Rover over the bridge to Skye

Photograph: John Voos

Highlands minus the tartan tat

At this time of year the Highlands of Scotland are peopled by strange folk wearing shiny plastic boots who look up with frowns at a shining sun but will welcome any leaden, snow-laden clouds that might coax an at-best diffident skiing season into March.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the winter sports fraternity have the place to themselves now. The normal tourist traps, the visitor centres, the toilets and even many pubs stay cold, closed down as if every day was like Sunday, their shuttered faces blindly awaiting the hordes of holidaymakers from around the world who will descend with the midges when the weather warms up.

I ended up there by simple accident, really. First, let me say something about timeshare. It can be a great way of getting holiday accommodation, where you trade your week in one part of the world for someone else's in another. But the system creaks noisily when it comes to British holiday destinations, and when we came to trade in our time in Florida for something closer to home it was neither close to our London home nor a very attractive prospect: the Scottish Highlands in February.

And as "Auntie", our 39-year-old Rover, lumbered up the A9, the snow started to fall and we only just got to our first stop, at Laggan, a few miles from Loch Ness along the Great Glen, before the blizzard set in. Next morning, the ski set looked happy setting out in their minibus for Annapolis, and Loch Lochy looked pretty becoming - extending a wintry welcome to two people and their dogs out for a walk in the snow.

That was it for snowfall (though some is forecast

'Scotland in February? You must be mad,' they told Bob Carter. But it pays to take the high road without the tourists in tow

for this weekend); but the walking, especially around Loch Ness, remained a delight as the ice at the lower level melted away from the snowdrops in a manner reminiscent of a natural history film of a year in the life of some fluffy Scottish mammal or other.

With the spring sunshine glinting off the snow, driving became motoring again. Isn't it strange how motoring sounds so much nicer than driving? Motoring means that as you trundle over the twisting, turning road from Invergarry to Loch Alsh through Glen Shiel you stop to take in the view of miles of white peaks stretching to the distance as you suddenly find yourself in what seems like familiar territory.

Where once the Kyle of Lochalsh brought to mind the Kyle Boat Song, there is a bridge there now and a car park where taciturn locals cast an eye over my 1950s bank manager's car and refused to be impressed. But they have seen a lot lately, living in a place where the scenery plays host to images of a dope-smoking policeman.

This is Hamish Macbeth country, where the tourists team in summer. Happily, as with so much in the area at this time of year, we had Plockton to ourselves, and yes, it is just how it looks on the TV: squat Scottish cottages in pink and white lining a placid harbour where small fishing boats bob as only Scottish fishing boats can.

Once on the west coast, there are other quiet

corners of the country where, wrapped up warm and snug, we would smugly stop to take in our exclusive view. At Arisaig, whence Bonnie Prince Charlie is said finally to have sailed off into exile; there is a stone cairn, in February a quiet spot to stop for a sandwich, so quiet that an otter came out to find out who was stopping at such a strange time of year.

It was even stranger in the seaside resort of Oban, where the watery late winter (or was it early spring?) sunshine also tempted out the odd hater. Or rather a hoy in swimming trunks was being almost forced into the water by his parents. I guess that's how they get them toughened up in Oban.

Those lonely roads and those empty glens were in such contrast to my previous experience of this area, a decade before, in August. My chief memory from then is of crowded camp-sites and a view, when driving, of coach company logos from Bonn and The Hague on the backs of those lumbering tourist bells-on-wheels. It really does pay to take the high road when nobody else is doing so.

Halfway through our fortnight we travelled down the A9 - the only road I know to have had its own commemorative postcard, which of course invites you to burst into McGonagall verse: *Ooooooh, it's a wonderful road, the Old A9, It runs down Scotland in a wiggly line.*

We followed it down to Kinloch Rannoch, the very heart of Scottish shorthair and tartan tourist country with the picturesque pass of Killiecrankie (deserted), Pitlochry (almost deserted, with almost desperation prices in the shops) and Queen's View over Loch Tummel where we watched the sun go down, setting the loch on fire, a view crowded with tourists in the summer but, again, an experience on that day shared by just the two of us.

From that spot you can just see the top of the one mountain we did go up, Schichallion, 1,083m above sea level, where mud on the lower slopes made way for up to a foot of old snow at the top, carved into curious shapes by the winter wind but in places untouched by human foot, a bit of a contrast to Ben Nevis where packed ice from too many boots made the going too treacherous. The mountain glared down through the mist daring us to come and have a go if we thought we were hard enough. We weren't and didn't.

The search for true solitude reached its successful conclusion on the marshy expanse of Rannoch Moor, proudly described as Europe's largest wilderness area. You drive from the hotel on Loch Rannoch to where the B846 peters out by Rannoch station and then set off along the side of Loch Laidon. Pretty soon the only sound is the wind and the birds and you can imagine the moor stretching off into infinity. It is lonely enough to send you a little bit mad, but then wasn't that what everybody said when we told them we were driving from London to the Highlands in a 1959 Rover in the bitter days between New Year and spring.

"Scotland in February? You must be mad."

Sea spray and superstition in old East Neuk

Traditional seafaring life still clings to the battered coast of Fife, as Alison Thomas found

It's the sound of the sea that draws you back to the East Neuk of Fife. Even on a calm day its murmurings and whisperings are everywhere. And when storm clouds gather, it charges in like a wild beast, hurling massive sheets of swirling spray over the high sea walls, drenching the streets of the villages, splashing the very doorsteps of the houses that huddle by the shores of the Firth of Forth.

Small wonder that the East Neuk fishermen have always been fiercely superstitious. Although modern technology has made boats safer, old taboos linger on. Rabbits, pigs, hares, the very mention of their names can provoke the monster's wrath.

But the day we walked along the coastal path from Anstruther to Pittenweem, its mood was benign. The winter sunshine laid a golden trail that danced and shimmered on the water, and only the occasional momentary feather of spray drifting

across Anstruther's outermost pier gave any hint of its latent power.

It wasn't far to walk, but with a nine-year-old in tow there were rocks to climb and shiny pebbles to gather - and anyway, why hurry? It was several hours before we made it up the steep cliff path and down the other side to Pittenweem harbour. We arrived in time to watch a fishing boat carefully manoeuvre its way through the narrow entrance, a scattering of noisy gulls circling overhead as it piloted her home. Another had already slipped safely inside and the crew was preparing to land.

East Neuk fishermen are a hardy breed. Once you could watch them at work in other harbours along the coast. Now only in Pittenweem do you catch a glimpse of a disappearing world. Yet the East Neuk remains a close-knit community, and a surprising number of fishermen still live here, even those who sail from Aberdeen, almost 100 miles away. Watson, Goudlay, Murray - the names of the crews today are the same as those on the lichen-covered tombstones of the spray-drenched kirkyards.

And the past lingers on. You see it in the colour-washed houses, their red pantiled roofs and crowstepped gables a legacy of the days when the East

Neuk was an important European trading centre and vessels from the Low Countries brought in pantries as ballast. You feel it, too, in the sea-caves, home to monks and hermits over a thousand years ago, and on the rocky shore where smugglers once unloaded their booty.

Each village retains its own sturdy individuality. Anstruther, its feet planted firmly on the ground, is the homely, purposeful one. Crail has a more comely air, with its handsome merchant houses, tranquil streets and picture-book harbour, whose ancient stone walls curl round protectively, embracing the boats that shelter there. Pittenweem is characterised by the bustle of the fleet and the steepest, narrowest "wynds" of all the coastal towns. In St Monans, too, houses jostle untidily from the high ground to the shore and its church crouches squat and defiant so close to the water that when the tide runs high the surge of the surf mingles with the hymns.

The sound of the sea was with us too when we visited a friend in her low-ceilinged cottage on Anstruther's Esplanade. To the front lay the estuary, where stepping stones lead at low tide to Castle Street beach and the centre of town. To the back, we looked out over the high wall of her brine-

splashed garden to the waters of the Forth beyond. We didn't worry when our son disappeared, for we knew where to find him. When sand, sea and rock pools are a quick clamour over the sea wall away, where else would a nine-year-old go?

It is the sea that has given the East Neuk its rich historical heritage and a succession of colourful heroes. Like Andrew Wilson, the notorious 18th-century smuggler whose execution in Edinburgh's Grassmarket led to the Porteous Riots. Or Captains Alexander Rodger and John Keay, whose thrilling finish in the great tea clipper race of 1866 made national headlines. Or William Smith, Arctic explorer and whaling skipper, who brought back to his native Cellardyke the gigantic jawbone of the largest whale ever caught off the Greenland coast.

The whaling trade may be a thing of the past, but when we wanted firm, tasty haddock we didn't have far to go, although it was fortunate for us that the tourist season was over. Anstruther Fish Bar has quite a reputation.

Throughout the summer people come from far afield, willing to queue for an hour or more in the chilly east wind of Shore Street. When your meal left Pittenweem fishmarket only that morning, it bears as much relation to the

flaccid, greasy fare of the average chip shop as a freshly-picked tomato to its timed counterpart.

Tucked away behind the Scottish Fisheries museum, in the buildings of an old smoke house and cooperage, we found a seafood establishment of a very different kind. With its sophisticated menu, including hot canapés with your aperitif and petits fours with your coffee, the Cellar Restaurant seemed an unlikely venue for the down-to-earth folk of Anstruther.

But this little corner of Fife is surprisingly cosmopolitan. Elie, with its golf courses and its pleasure boats, is where the gentry live, or in the peaceful farming communities inland. And only 10 miles away lies the ancient town of St Andrews. Its university attracts the well-heeled offspring of Middle England, its Old Course lures golfers from all over the world, and its beguiling combination of cloister, golf and gown make it a popular retirement home for world-weary city dwellers.

Ten miles. A 15-minute drive. Another world.

Tourist Information, 70 Market Street, St Andrews (01334 472021). The Cellar, 24 East Green, Anstruther (01333 310378). Anstruther Fish Bar, 17 Shore Street (01333 310518).

48 hours in South Tyneside

The 'Angel of the North' sculpture has thrust attention on Gateshead and its surroundings. Simon Calder checks out the prospects for a weekend break south of the Tyne

Why go now?

Because the vast span of the new Angel is already a tourist attraction. Because no one that I know has been for a weekend break in South Tyneside. And because if and when you need some big city life, Newcastle is just a bridge away.

Beam down

Virgin Trains and GNER bring you from most parts of the kingdom direct to Newcastle. I paid £29 return for the three-hour run from London on GNER, booked in advance on 0345 225225. For other fares and timings, call National Rail Enquiries on 0345 484950. From Newcastle Central station you can walk across to Gateshead or take the highly efficient Metro railway.

Get your bearings

A series of settlements is strung out along the south bank of the Tyne. The most important and sprawling is Gateshead, directly south of Newcastle. Going east from here, you pass through Felling, Hebburn and Jarrow. The Metro runs between Gateshead and these communities every eight minutes during the day.

Gateshead must be expecting a flood of visitors, because it has two tourist information bureaux: in the Central Library on Prince Consort Road (0191-477 3478) and in the MetroCentre (0191-460 6345).

Check in

Finding a place to sleep is more of a problem in South Tyneside than in other weekend break destinations. The MetroCentre Marriott (0191-493 2233) feels like an airport hotel in search of an airport, but has a weekend special on Friday, Saturday or Sunday night of £57 single/£64 double. The Riverside Lodge, on the south bank of the Tyne at Felling (0191-495 0282), is difficult to reach without a car, but has a good weekend rate of £33.50 single/£43.50 double.

Take a ride

... to a ride. The seven-minute train trip between Newcastle Central and the MetroCentre sweeps you regally across the Tyne, then swerves to the right (affording a glimpse of an angel) and trundles along to "Europe's biggest covered shopping and leisure complex". Inside is a fully-fledged funfair. A roller-coaster ride costs £1.80.

Window shopping

The MetroCentre resembles a cross between Center Parcs and a high street. This one-stop shopping experience includes

touches such as a "Mediterranean village" and team shops for both of the local soccer rivals, Newcastle and Sunderland. No wonder so many of the shops elsewhere on South Tyneside are boarded up.

Take a hike

Clutching your new Sunderland away kit (and possibly your jaw, the MetroCentre also has an on-site dentist), you can quickly escape to one of the most beautiful corners of the North-east. Walk through the village of Swallowwell to the start of Derwent Walk country park.

An old railway line leads you gently upwards through an increasingly dramatic valley, carved out by the river Derwent. The first part is prettily wooded. Then a viaduct ushers you across the river and into spectacular open country. You can't see the Angel from here but to compensate, one proprietor of Gillside Hall has built a column on the scale of Nelson's in Trafalgar Square. After three bracing miles you reach

the village of Rowland's Gill. Either take a bus back from here, or bear left along the road to the village of Sheep Hill, taking you up a steep and shady valley.

Lunch on the run

Back in Gateshead town centre, the options are limited. M&M's fish & chip shop, on the corner of High Street and Park Lane, promises: "We're not famous, but we are the best." After a scrumptious and satisfying cod and chips (£2.40), I agree.

Cultural afternoon

My ancient guidebook notes that South Tyneside has "extensive populated and industrial areas, with some collieries". When Gateshead was rich and famous, the town created suitably grand municipal buildings. The exterior of the Shipley Art Gallery (oo Prince Consort Road; 0191-477 1495) maintains an air of prosperity. Inside, the story of the town is revealed in a striking exhibition called *Made in Gateshead*, which

painfully traces the decline of heavy industry and consequent social vacuum that afflicts much of South Tyneside.

An aperitif

Jarrow has a similarly imposing collection of civic architecture, notably the fiercely red-brick town hall. A plaque on the wall commemorates a defining moment in 20th century British history: "the Jarrow Crusade of October 5th, 1936". At the height of the Depression, thousands of unemployed men set out to march to London to demand work and dignity. Drink to the human spirit at the Jarrow Crusaders, a Vaux pub behind the town hall.

Demure dinner

Go to Newcastle.

Angel of the morning

Judging by the crowds around Antony Gormley's sculpture on Wednesday afternoon, the Angel of the North will be a huge

success in drawing tourists to South Tyneside. From a distance, the sculpture resembles an upturned Spitfire. The closer you get, the more you appreciate the warm (if a little rusty) welcome from opeco arms 175ft across.

Unless you are travelling by road along the A1, finding the figure can be difficult. It is perched beside the Durham Road four miles south of Gateshead town centre, reached by bus 1, 21, 25, 26 among others.

Sunday afternoon: go to church

Bede's World sounds alarmingly like an ecclesiastical version of the MetroCentre. It is irritatingly difficult to find: the Metro station that bears the historian's name is buried amidst an industrial park east of Jarrow, almost a mile from Bede's World. On Sundays, it keeps maddeningly short opening times (2.30-5.30pm). Yet once you reach it, grumpiness evaporates.

The Venerable Bede lived, wrote and died in the confines of St Paul's monastery.

The present-day church embraces its foundations and even some Roman masonry - Watling Street ended on the south bank of the Tyne. Uphill from the church, you enter fine old Jarrow Hall, where the life of the writer of *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglonum* is placed in the context of a turbulent time around AD 700. (You also learn that Bede was largely responsible for counting years from the birth of Christ; he deserves a mention in the Millennium Dome.)

Adjacent, in a most unlikely location, between giant chemical storage tanks and a parade of pylons, an Anglo-Saxon village has been created, complete with 20th-century wattle and daub, and a couple of venerable pigs - the Tyneside Two?

The visitor is bound to note the contrast between the vitality of this made-up village and the dereliction that abounds outside. But if the Angel of the North can draw people to South Tyneside, tourism may mark the beginning of a new and cheerier chapter for the area.

Angel of mercy: if the sculpture continues to draw tourists to the area, a cheerier chapter looks certain for South Tyneside

Photograph: David Rose



Hanging's too good for 'em

Nottingham's Galleries of Justice offer flogging, branding, the pillory and the stocks. Louise Duffield braved the dungeons

Hanging, transportation, solitary confinement, branding with a hot iron - you see it all at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham. The former Shire Hall and county gaol in the city's Lace Market area has been turned into a museum dedicated to crime, punishment and law.

The current *Condemned!* exhibition takes visitors through the days when petty theft could mean years in a filthy prison, and when arson and rioting could lead to hanging. Indeed, the graphic reconstruction of the dubious trial of George Beck for his part in the 1831 Reform Bill riots in the splendid original criminal court room shows how unjust justice can be.

From there, visitors - each bearing a different prisoner number - are sent down to the cold cells to be confronted by gaolers and "punished" for their crimes. They experience the hell holes that were prisons, what it was like to be transported to Australia, and such punishments as the stocks and the pillory. The small exercise yard, still bearing the engravings of condemned criminals, contains a full-size working gallows.

The Galleries bring ideas about punishment right up to date with a thought-provoking and hard-hitting exhibition on hanging - which visitors can avoid if they choose - and suggestions about dealing with criminals in the future. Over the next 17 months the Galleries of Justice will continue to expand, adding new police galleries based in the original 1905 police station, revamped and extended crime and punishment galleries, and discovery galleries centring on civil law. The eventual aim is for it to become the National Museum of Law.

The visitors

Gill Davis, a nursery teacher from



Nottingham's Galleries of Justice

Photograph: Sean Paget/News Team

Derby, went to the Galleries of Justice with her daughter Anna, 14, and son Tom, 11.

Gill: There was a lot more there than I thought. I didn't realise we would be going down into the cells beneath. I liked the way we were given our own prisoner numbers and we became part of the system, so that the law process happened to us. It made it personal. The bits where there was sound and video were good in intermittently taking you away from all the reading. You need those bits to break it up. There is a lot of information to read - so children coming here need quite a high level of literacy. Some of the exhibitions would be quite frightening for very young children.

The atmosphere was very good in the court room and cells. The staff who were dressed as gaolers and court officials were highly convincing. I think the Galleries of Justice pro-

vide a good balance between guides and areas where you wander at your own speed. There's plenty to see and do, and I would definitely come back again. You can be in there for quite a while, but when the extra bit opens it will be a full day.

Anna: I thought it was very realistic. The bit about hanging really sticks in your mind. It might be a bit scary for small children but you are given the choice of whether you want to walk that way or not. The guard was very intimidating and makes you feel as if you're a prisoner. I felt I learnt quite a lot about some of the punishments that were given over history, and also that sometimes people's punishments did not fit the crime, but they were just made an example of.

Tom: It was very interesting and realistic in the way they did the court scenes. It was strict. I knew that some

of the punishments were harsh, but some of them were a bit strong. When you stole a loaf of bread you got seven years in prison. Sometimes the deportation couldn't really be called punishment, because you got land. People would commit crime just to get deported, because it was a new start in a new country with no pollution and with warm weather.

The guard who had the scissors to cut our hair when we went to the cells was realistic. It was very cold down there. It might have been nice to have had some realistic smells as well.

The deal

The Galleries of Justice is at the Shire Hall, High Pavement, Lace Market, Nottingham (0115-952 0555).

Open: Tuesday to Sunday and Bank Holidays 10am-5pm. Closed 24-26 December. As a result of redevelopment the current *Condemned!* exhibition will close on 20 April for expansion. New police galleries open on 6 April, and crime and punishment galleries on 20 July.

Admission: Until 20 April, adults £4.25, children aged 5-14 £2.95, family ticket for two adults and two children £11.95. For police galleries (from 6 April), adults £3.95, children £3.50, family ticket £11.95. From 20 July, police galleries and crime and punishment galleries, adults £7.95, children £4.95, family ticket £23.95. Season tickets, special events and group rates available.

Access: mobility-impaired visitors currently have access to only 60 per cent of the exhibition, but this rises to 90 per cent in July.

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Catering: courtyard cafe and judges' pantry serving snacks, etc, available from 2 March.

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Ski hell, ski heaven

Snow, food, hotel - satisfying the demands of the whole family can be tricky. For Louise Levene, it took two tries

You can't please everybody. Or can you? Is it possible to find a skiing holiday that can satisfy a five-year-old, an adult beginner, a lapsed intermediate aged 55 and a keen skier? Last year we got it wrong. This year we finally got it right.

The choice of resort for February 1997 was always going to be complicated by the fact that the 55-year-old (my mother) is something of a luxury model. In her extensive experience, hotels are those nice places where they serve caviar from ice sculptures in the shape of the Sydney Opera House. Switzerland, spiritual home of the luxury hotel, seemed the obvious place to look for a resort that would offer village-based skiing but still put chocolate truffles on your pillow. If the brochures were any guide, the obvious winner was a five-star establishment in Saas Fee. How wrong we were.

Our chosen hotel was decorated in a rather queasy mixture of knotty pine and chandeliers. The thing to remember about hotel star systems is that stars are awarded not for taste or charm, but for piffing little things like room safes and shrink-wrapped lavatory seats. Never mind. It looked swish enough - at ground level anyway.

Upstairs was a different story. We had asked for a quiet room on a high floor. What did we get? An overheated second-floor shoebox overlooking a noisy night-club. The bobbie-batted rep with the name of his employers splattered helpfully across his face, reminded us that the small print in the brochure stressed special requests could not be guaranteed. My mother, veteran of a hundred Presidential Suites, wasted no time and few words. "It's a horrible room. You know yourself it's horrible. I'm sure you have something else." Within minutes we

had risen two floors and the ceiling had risen by 6ft.

Time for a stiff drink. This very hotel (which shall remain nameless: a lot can happen in 12 months) had once been celebrated in a Sunday newspaper for the staff's legendary ability to remember how you like your Martinis from one year to the next. A likely story. In my experience the sweet but strangely ineffectual staff would have trouble remembering that you ordered a Martini at all. The service in the three restaurants was slower than molasses. Wherever you ate, you were guaranteed 30 minutes staring at a greasy plate between courses, while your five-year-old curled up as the clock struck 10. Nor was the food always worth the wait. Anything in buffet form was delicious, but not for a dish that needed to be bodily transferred from kitchen to table, and you'd better bring a sleeping-bag. These foodie disappointments climaxed in the weekly Lobster Banquet, an extravaganza staged, unaccountably, beside the indoor swimming-pool in an atmosphere optimistically described in the literature as "Karibische", but which was about as Bajan as a stale banana sandwich. The three groups who opted for this fishy fiasco were seated so far from culinary HQ that we remained forgotten for 40 minutes at a time while we waited for the next instalment of rubbery crustacean to be delivered to our pool-side sauna by dozy youths in Bermuda shorts.

North-facing slopes and a good fall of snow meant that the skiing was fabulous. But you can't ski all the time. Eating out was almost as disappointing as eating in. We tried lunching in a crowded *Konditorei*

and were reduced to ordering toasted ham and cheese sandwiches and a small pizza. One doesn't expect much from a ham and cheese sandwich - a global commodity that can be found on every snack menu from Rio to Ramsgate - but there are two things one expects from a pizza: it should be hot, and the bottom should be harder than the top. This pizza failed on both counts. No time to mince words: "Fräulein? Please take this away. It isn't very nice." The waitress looked at me in frank disbelief and removed the plate, only to return with it 10 minutes later, steam rising from the curdled pool of cheese. "But we don't want it at all. It isn't very nice," I explained.

"Exyousse me madame," hissed the by now exasperated woman, "but ziss is not a restaurant." I pointed out that whatever they called themselves, they had no business putting pizza on the menu if they couldn't defrost it adequately.

We had better meals, but ooze was exceptional and all were overpriced. It was as if standards fell and prices rose to the levels that would be tolerated by the tourist population, as if the Swiss reputation for good catering had no basis in native pride in the food itself. They do things rather differently in France.

And so, 12 months later, having lost faith in Swiss hotel-keeping, the picky parent agrees to risk a chalet holiday in Méribel. Once again, comfort was the major concern. After wading through page after glossy page of brochures offering rooms that captive in sleep 12 in a species of bunk shelving that wouldn't disgrace a Tokyo flop-house, we established that Simply Ski was one of

the few operators who understood that queuing for a communal lavatory was not an option. The chalet not only had exemplary *en suite* plumbing, it also had a cook who could really cook.

So far so good. What about Méribel itself? Pretty, idyllic pine chalets, sexy clothes shops, Olympic swimming-pool, divine Savoyard food and a free resort bus ensured that a good time was had by all. The skiing wasn't bad either, thanks to good snow and an outfit called Ski Cocktail which had the adult beginner on blue runs with in days and rendered the six-year-old a positive hazard.

The other big improvement on last year was the introduction of the Eurostar Ski Train from Waterloo, which takes you to Moutiers in seven-and-a-half hours, ready for a smooth, half-hour transfer by minibus.

That may sound like a long time to spend on a train, but by the time you've trekked out to Heathrow and spent two hours in Tie Rack, three hours mopping up spilled Ribena in tourist class and three hours helping a toddler throw up into a paper bag on the coach from Lyons, you really might be better off admiring the mistletoe-garlanded trees of Northern France while nucking into home-made sandwiches and playing cards. The picnic was essential. The Eurostar buffet last week was reduced to a peculiar waffle thickly encrusted with sugar and cinnamon that proved to be a close relative of the polystyrene ceiling tile. It can only be a matter of time before they turn up on the menus of Swiss cafés.

Simply Ski 0181-742 2541. Eurostar 03-45 303030



The Méribel mbc pretty place, good skiing, excellent lessons - and you can now get there on Eurostar from Waterloo Photograph: Ian Jones/Skishoot-Offshoot

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9/ECLIPSE TRIPS

The Full Moonty

On Thursday, a stripe of darkness will descend upon Latin America. Our turn next, writes Simon Calder – but Britain's travel industry is in danger of being eclipsed itself.

Silence envelops you as completely as the darkness. For the painfully finite seconds of totality, you and your fellow watchers are smothered by a blanket of awe and humility as the heavens show their hand. The meek moon reveals, briefly, its power to suppress a swaggering sun which can but flare feebly behind the solid black disc. This is a demonstration of astronomical contempt that will live with you for ever.

All of which was completely lost on the merry band of eclipse watchers in Mongolia last March. I had bade farewell to them at the Eurostar terminal at Waterloo. Bearing battered trunks trussed firmly with fine brass fittings, they were setting out by train to a desolate point outside the world's coolest capital, Ulan Bator. About an hour before the 1997 total solar eclipse, a snowstorm muscled over the horizon and rained on the parade of amateur astronomers lined up to watch the universe at work.

They were, my reports suggest, remarkably sanguine about the maddening meteorological intervention. Perhaps that's because we live in an astonishingly fortunate age when cheap travel makes it possible to witness next Thursday's total eclipse of the sun for a sum equivalent to a fortnight's work at the average British wage. While the British are generally characterised as sun-seekers, a substantial minority of us who like to see the orb of our desires disappear. Since the great Indian event of 1995 (where I lost my eclipse virginity), the holidaying fraternity has been looking forward to another warm weather experience.

You'd be lucky, though, to find a seat on a flight to the favoured site for viewing this year's totality: the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao. The astronomer Dr John Mason said yesterday there was not a cloud within 1,000 miles of the island.

Roughly once a year, a stripe of the earth's surface will be flung into darkness as the moon blots out the sun. And once you're started on eclipse tourism, it's difficult to stop at the sun. Many enthusiasts track down more esoteric lunar eclipses – when the earth blacks out a full moon, with the dramatic results demonstrated (pictured, right) seen in Arizona in 1996.

The trick, though, for solar eclipses is to find a venue that (a) you can reach relatively easily, and (b) will be free of cloud cover. A third consideration is, according to the travel industry's eclipse guru Brian McGee: "Ambience – we find there's a trade-off between maximising the length of totality and enjoying the surroundings."

As a satisfied customer of Mr McGee's company, Explorers' Tours, I am inclined to agree. In 1995 I spent the (for me) hitherto unheard-of sum of £1,400 on a fortnight's holiday in India, witnessing the eclipse at the extraordinary abandoned fort of Fatehpur Sikri, between Jaipur and Agra. Totality lasted barely a minute, which for old eclipsians is a seven-stone solar weakening. Thursday's show will last around three minutes. But the magical surroundings of heroically crumbling sandstone made the event a surreal study of humankind, showing not only our innate fragility but also how over-excited we can get about an entirely predictable event.

Predicting the track of an eclipse is a relatively trivial scientific exercise. We know that on Wednesday 11 August next year, at 11.11am,

the path of totality will make landfall a mile north of St Just, the village north of Land's End. In the following minute, it will sweep across west Cornwall just north of Penzance and south of Falmouth. The line of darkness will streak across the Channel, then start blacking out a series of cities: Luxembourg, Stuttgart, Munich and Bucharest will experience totality, whereas Paris, Vienna and Budapest will see more than 99 per cent of the sun disappear.

Within Britain, anyone south of Newcastle will experience a significant darkening of the sky – seen through a Mylar viewer, the sun will look like the slenderest crescent moon. But for the Full Moonty, you have to head for the south-western tip of Britain.

Which is when life gets tricky. Thursday's eclipse will spark huge interest in the highest astronomical event in Britain for 70 years: a total solar eclipse over our favourite holiday county, Cornwall. HM Nautical Almanac Office, which produces an excellent guide to the event, says it "has the potential of being seen by the largest number of people in the history of eclipse-watching". But the lack of planning in the UK amounts to a Millennium Dome-type muddle. It is still not clear what facilities are available for amateur astronomers, or how they will get there.

The traffic jams on the A30 in Cornwall are dreadful in the middle of any August, let alone one in which everyone is trying to straddle the solid black line of totality. History demonstrates that sanity becomes a precious commodity whenever a total eclipse appears, and anyone who values their mental stability will want to travel by rail. Mr McGee has already chartered a couple of special trains to travel overnight to Penzance. But anyone who wishes to rely on scheduled trains is in for a communications black-out.

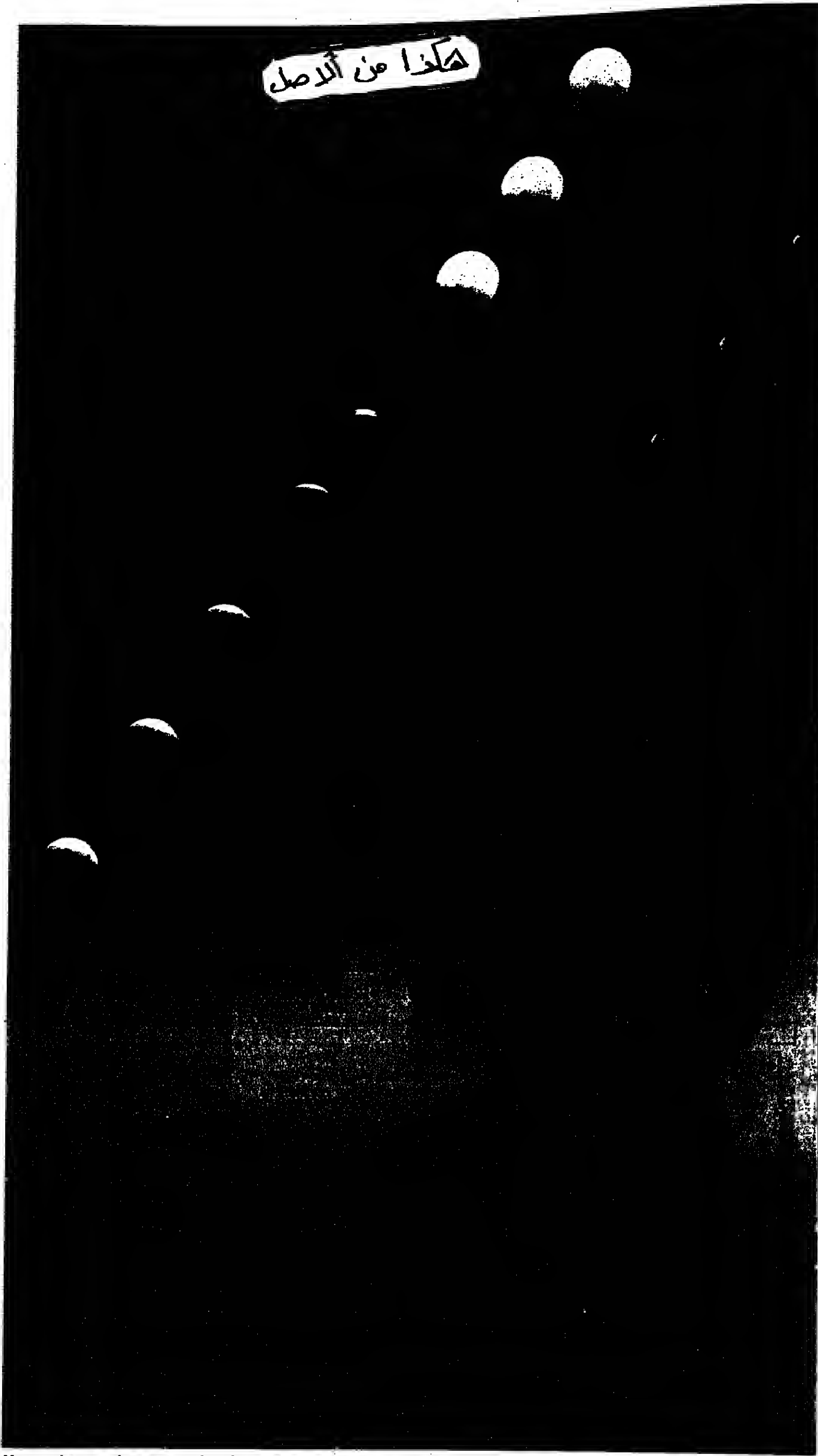
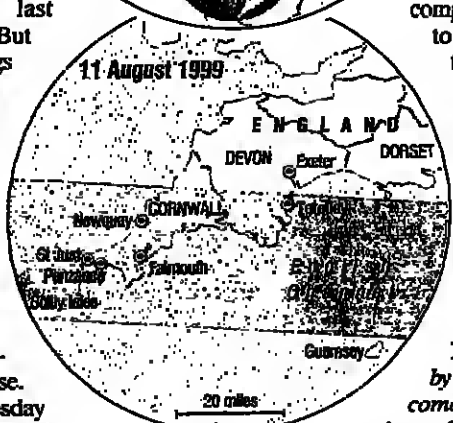
A declaration of self-interest. I live in Waterloo, whence the sleeper departs for Penzance – the optimum ambience for eclipse-viewing. My extended family are keen to be there – it'll be the last for 92 years. Get the overnight train down, we reckon. Enjoy an astronomical breakfast at the café opposite the station, then wander along the sands to Marazion to watch the eclipse within the awesome framework afforded by St Michael's Mount. Spend the rest of the day winding down on the beach, then head back to the station and dream heavenly dreams all the way back to Waterloo.

We can fill an entire carriage on the sleeper. The current going rate is £25 return, but in view of the inevitable heavy demand we are prepared to pay, right now, twice as much to guarantee our place out of the sun. That represents potential earnings to Great Western of about £5,000 for doing nothing trickier than hooking up an extra carriage to the train.

The problem is that the company is unwilling or unable to take the money and run the train. When you phone up and try to book, you are told that no bookings will be taken until April 1999.

Perhaps it's the wrong kind of eclipse.

Explorers' Tours: 01753 681999. 'A Guide to the 1999 Total Eclipse of the Sun', by Steve Bell (HMSO, £5.95) comes complete with Mylar viewer. Call 0171-873 9090.



Moon on the move: time exposure shot of the lunar eclipse of September 1996, seen in Phoenix, Arizona

Photograph: Bob Dunn/Mesa Tribune

Our favourite foreign country, France, yesterday staged an open day at the new French Travel Centre in Piccadilly, central London. But while Saturday opening, refurbished premises and the addition of ferry operators is to be welcomed, anyone planning to visit the country in June or July this year could encounter a series of nasty surprises.

You could blame football, because the World Cup finals will take place around France from 10 June to 12 July. But even with the addition of a million soccer fans there should be room for everyone; France is the biggest tourist destination in the world, with 60 million visitors a year, and



SIMON CALDER

the tournament carefully avoids peak holiday season in Europe. From previous experience, such as Italy in 1990, many people who would otherwise visit the country

will be deterred by the prospect of football frenzy. But those of us who go to France face higher prices and discrimination against single-sex groups.

The best way to travel around western Europe's largest country, for both soccer fans or non-footballing Francophiles, is by train. The excellent Euro Domino ticket allows 10 days of unlimited rail travel for £200. In June and July, though, the price increases by £20; it falls again on 1 August.

Deterred by such profiteering, many travellers will instead take advantage of low cross-Channel fares, and pack four or five people into a car for a jaunt to and around France. But if you're hoping to keep down costs by staying at some of the country's excellent campsites, make sure you take at least one member of the opposite gender along.

"ABTOF takes action on World Cup hooligans", reads a headline in the industry journal *Travel Weekly*. The story reveals how members of the Association of British

Tour Operators to France plan to prevent trouble: by banning single-sex group bookings during the event. So anyone who happens to prefer to holiday with people of the same gender will have problems finding somewhere cheap and cheerful to stay.

The tour operators' real worry is that bunches of drunken lads will cause problems, but equal opportunity legislation means that women-only groups have to be banned too.

Determined "World Cup hooligans" will find it easy to circumvent the rule, just by taking along a token woman supporter (there are some pretty terrifying ones to be found on the terraces of my team, Crawley Town). But groups of nuns (or monks) visiting France will be barred from campsites, as will gay or lesbian holidaymakers.

How can you find out more about such arbitrary rules and price rises? By contacting the new French Travel Centre. Since the vast majority of British travellers to France do not live within easy reach of

central London, most will have to rely on the phone.

France, you may recall, began the fashion for premium-rate numbers when it replaced its normal London line by 0891 244123, costing 49 pence a minute. Many other tourist offices have followed suit; Australia is the latest to introduce premium-rate lines, though until July you can still call the Tourist Commission on the non-premium 0990 561434.

The strangest policy of all is operated by Holland. The Netherlands Board of Tourism runs a helpful and efficient service using a London number, but says it is not for publication.

The board insists you can find out the number only by first dialling the premium-rate recorded information line 0891 717777. It cost me £3. Living in London, I would have visited in person – except that the office is open to visitors only from 1pm-3pm, Monday to Friday.

The new French Travel Centre is at 178 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL.

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Old habits die hard

Pilchards for dinner, en suite cells with sex-defying single iron beds, lights out at 9.30 – and no whispering. Born-again atheist Michael Delahaye mortifies the flesh at the monastery of La Verna in Tuscany

Some years ago a magazine ran a competition for the most unlikely newspaper headline. The winner, as I recall, was "POPE ELOPES". It was with a similar sense of the incongruous that, just after Christmas, I asked my wife to book us a double room in a Franciscan monastery.

The Sanctuary of La Verna is between Florence and Urbino. Its claim to fame is that for a decade, between 1214 and 1224, St Francis was a regular visitor. But what makes this the second most important Franciscan site in the world, after Assisi, is that it was here the saint received the stigmata – the holes in his hands and feet in imitation of Christ's crucifixion.

Nearly 800 years later, La Verna is still a "working" monastery, with two dozen resident monks and a couple of nuns. And, in the age-old tradition of offering hospitality to weary pilgrims, it takes in paying guests.

For anyone who has ever wondered why holy places are so often high places, La Verna provides the answer – closer to Heaven and about as hard to reach. More than 4,000ft above sea level, the monastery is built on – and into – an extraordinary outcrop of rock. During the winter months it's literally lost in the clouds. As you approach through a forest dripping with moisture, up a series of increasingly tight switch-backs, it's hard not to feel like the unsuspecting Jonathan Harker in one of those early Dracula movies.

The night we arrived, Sister Priscilla was on reception, swathed in black anorak and white scarf. She referred to the bookings list... "Ah, numero ventisei".

Room 26 turned out to be an "en suite cell", 10ft by 10, with a pair of single beds, shower and lavatory. It was clean and adequate, although during the night my wife was to develop a peculiar devotion to the cast-iron radiator. On the back of the door was an injunction against whispering and giggling after 10pm.

For a number of reasons, this is not a place for honeymoon couples. All beds are narrow and chastely

single. *Hic hancum nullum pium.* Indeed, only in recent years have married couples been allowed to share rooms, although in our case Sister Priscilla had the delicacy not to demand documentary proof.

For anyone more familiar with hotels, the biggest problem is protocol. Should you say grace before eating? (Optional) Do you tip a nun? (No) Or do you discreetly drop a couple of coins into the offertory box? (That'll do nicely, God bless.)

Nor should you expect too much in the culinary department. The Franciscans, it soon becomes clear, are not a gastronomic order. Turning over our place-cards at dinner, we were heartened to see "vitello ai ferri" and "anitra arrosto" on the menu. This, we told ourselves, would be a meal to remember.

At this point something like a miracle occurred as the grilled veal and roast duck were transformed into a hard-boiled egg, a slice of cheese and half a pilchard. OK, so a fish was once the secret sign of Christianity – but, Madonna, a pilchard?

When we pointed to the back of the place-card, our server shook his head: "That's the summer menu. This is winter." A diner at the next table murmured "Buon appetito", thoughtfully adding, "Good hunger."

Dinner over, we were about to settle in with a compensatory glass of the monastery's excellent Lamponi – a diabolically tempting 33 per cent proof raspberry liqueur – when we were sent to bed. Lights out, doors locked, heating off. *Buona Notte*. It was 9.30pm.

None of this is to diminish the extraordinary power of the place. You might even argue it helps concentrate the mind. La Verna is Gethsemane without the coaches; Lourdes minus the plaster knick-knackery.

As a born-again atheist, I'm hardly qualified to judge but I've no doubt that anyone seeking the "spirit of St Francis" is more likely to find it here than at Assisi (of which my clearest memory is buying our daughter a plastic globe of

St Francis in a snow storm). It's a chastening experience to open the door on one of the sanctuary's many chapels, guidebook in hand, camera cocked, to discover a cowed monk kneeling, still as a statue, in silent prayer.

The morning of our second day, I woke to the sound of bells. Leaving my wife still incanting a fiftieth "Shiver me cloisters", I skipped the 7am service and set off in the mist for La Penna, the mountain peak where St Francis and his brethren used to meditate and pray.

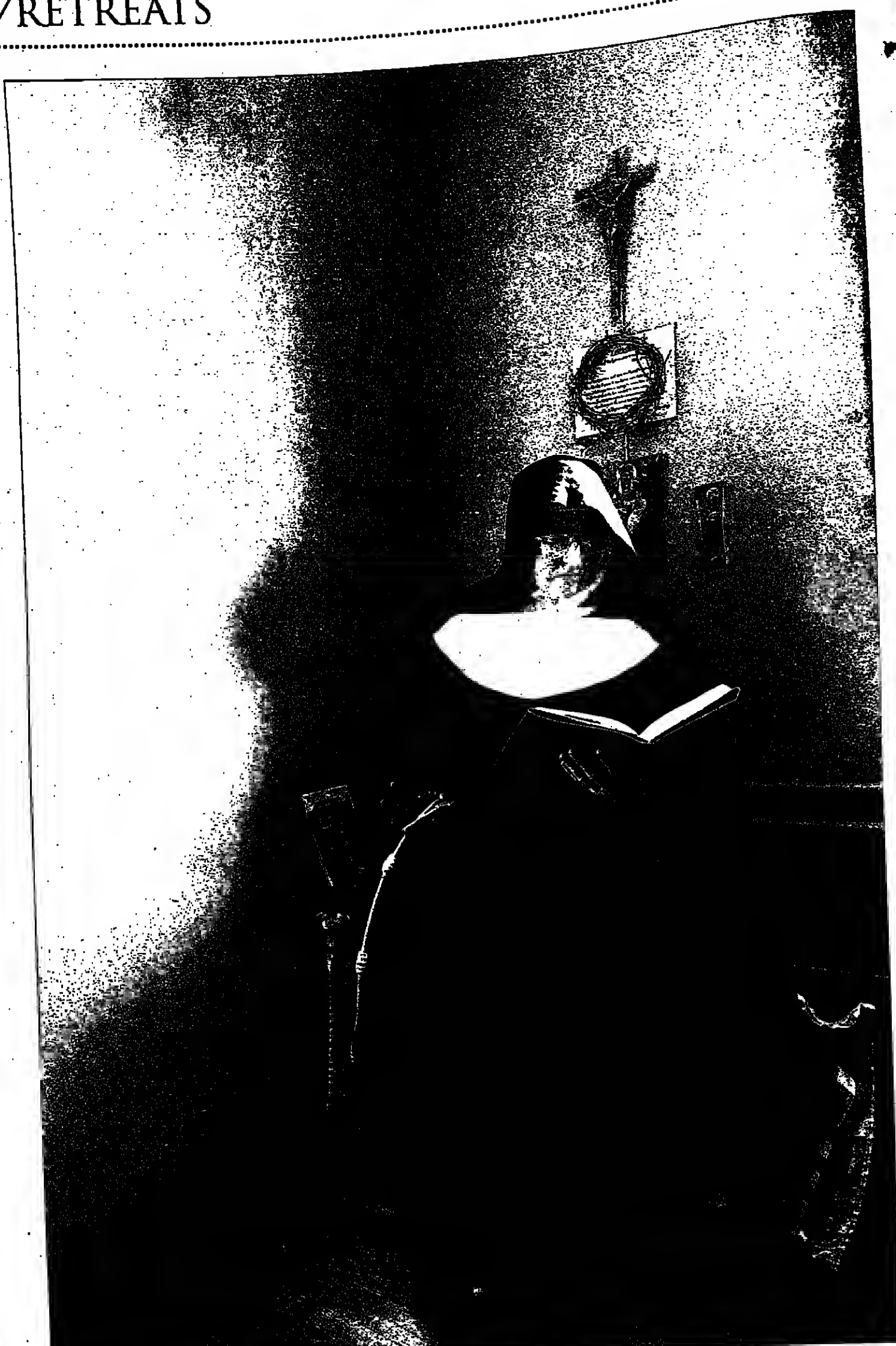
Visibility was down to 20 yards. As I climbed through the forest of pine and beech, the only sound was the occasional crack of gunfire from hunters in the valley below. St Francis would certainly not have approved.

This is not a walk for unsupervised children. At the very top there is a cross and, one pace beyond, a vertiginous drop of several hundred feet – an invitation, if ever there was one, to step into eternity. Walking back by a different route, you come upon a succession of tiny stone chapels. The most charming is that of the Blessed John – a Franciscan brother who, centuries before tree-bugging became fashionable, spent his days praying in front of a giant beech. When the tree died, the chapel with its low-walled courtyard was built in its place.

Back in the monastery, there are more than a dozen della Robbia glazed reliefs. The best is in the Basilica – a stunning Annunciation by Andrea della Robbia. In the Chapel of the Blessed Stigmata, before a Crucifixion by Andrea, you can see the stone on which St Francis received his wounds.

You don't have to be religious to appreciate La Verna, but it probably helps. If, as a bonus, you fancy a foretaste of Purgatory, make the trip in winter. On the other hand, it's telling that St Francis himself seems to have come here only during the summer months.

Sanctuario della Verna, 53010 Chiusi della Verna, la Toscana (00 39 575 5341) Full board: 62,000 lire per person (approx £22)



La Verna is Gethsemane without the coaches; Lourdes minus the plaster knick-knackery

Photograph: Karen Robinson

The great escape to a no-frills parador

All she wanted was a good night's sleep, but Laurel Berger ended up joining the nuns in singing the night office

I'd been in Madrid just a week when the long-ing began. I'd been staying in a borrowed flat overlooking a square that was the hub of a rowdy neighbourhood fiesta. At night, unable to sleep, I'd drift into a twilight state in which vast open spaces, lovely hills, empty villages took shape in my mind's eye. It was then I decided to get myself to a nunnery.

Traditionally, Spain's monastic communities have offered hospitality to pilgrims and spiritual seekers; but in recent years many have opened guesthouses for travellers as well. For less than £15 a night you can sleep and eat in a religious monument while experiencing the stillness of contemplative life, so I was told.

I telephoned the Benedictine abbey of San Salvador in the village of Palacios de Benaver. It was located, the guest mistress said, 20km north of Burgos, 2km off the pilgrims' route to Santiago. No mountains, just grain fields. It didn't sound promising.

I imagined a dilapidated convent in the middle of some backwater ringed by scorched fields; a cell with a pallet bed and a cold-water shower down the hall; coarse meals of bean stews and sausage. In short, the kind of place my lefty Spanish friends wouldn't go to for love or money. But on the list that the Castilla-León tourist board had supplied, it was the only one on my list that had any vacancies. So I went anyway.

The city of Burgos is a three-hour bus ride from Madrid. The taxi I took from there rattled along a country road through the heart of old Castile, a flat, stony, bone-dry land, known for its Romanesque ruins, fabulous churches and arch-conservative citizenry.

When we entered the deserted village – a warren of cut stone edifices which looked as though one strong gust of wind would reduce them to dust – the driver stopped to ask directions to the abbey. The woman he addressed looked at us as if she hadn't spoken in the longest time and waved vaguely to the north.

"Are you the girl who called last night?" asked Concepción, the guest mistress and superior, just beyond the massive oak portal. The abbey, which dates from the 12th century, stood on the fringes of the pueblo, enclosed by a 10ft high wall of un-mortared stone, it was sunk into a promontory overlooking lime-capped slopes; attached to it was a small Gothic church with an octagonal apse whose sections jutted out like petals on a flower.

I followed the superior through the courtyard of cypress trees and espaliered roses, to the 22-room guesthouse, a converted elementary school, adjoining the cloister. "We had to shut it down four years ago," she said ruefully, "when there were no children left to teach." My fiercely white room, sparsely decorated with heavy Castilian furniture and a crucifix, gave on to the gardens. There was a modern en suite bathroom. "Lunch is at 2pm," Sor Concepción said,



Cross purposes

handing over the room key. "Please be on time," I folded back the bedspread, slipped off my espadrilles and lay on top of the rough sheets. They smelled of bleach and fresh air. Outside, the noon sun was beating down on the stones but the building's thick masonry walls kept the heat out. I heard birdsong, the sound of a tractor, angelus bells. When I awoke it was time for lunch.

The men and women seated at the long dining table were like holiday-making Spaniards everywhere: loud, garrulous, a bit cheeky. The nuns served morcilla, a locally made blood sausage, and roast pork; the Rioja poured freely.

I met a consumptive-looking young writer who confessed that when he first got here he expected to find himself surrounded by religious and suicide candidates. But aside from a couple of genuinely devout Catholics, most of the other guests were searching for nothing more transcendent than a place of repose. They saw

the abbey as a kind of no-frills parador. There was a student preparing for exams; a jockey Catalan salesman; a few couples touring the region. And me, I was just chasing a good night's sleep.

Vespers. I dragged my new friends on a nature walk. We followed a dirt track into the hills and observed the poplar trees in the dying light. Middle-aged men, all of them, they groused the whole way. Joaquín kept stepping in the hrambles; José feared it would rain; Arman, the sales-

man, was ruining his good shoes. But what is more, he announced in solemn tones, the *hora del aperitivo* was now upon us. He'd been there all week, he said, and he was sick of the nuns' cooking. There was a bar in the next town that was supposed to do very nice tapes.

And so we abandoned our expedition and made our way north in Arman's Nissan to a forlorn little pueblo called Villandino, where half the locals seemed to be packed into the town's grotty little bar, which had no tapas whatsoever. We ordered pints and shared a bag of crisps. As children, they told me, their dread of the church was greater than their dread of Francis. "The priesthood ruled this country for 50 years," said Arman, lighting a Marlboro. "And it was 'shut up or put up' for the rest of us."

When we got back to Palacios, dinner was already on the table. I picked at my food but poished off dessert, queso de Burgos – a fresh,

bland-tasting white cheese drizzled with honey from the convent's apiary. Although I'd read that it wasn't good form to address the nuns, these sisters, some of whom hadn't left the enclosure in decades, were positively loquacious.

Later, I chatted to one of the oldest nuns, who spoke of the convent's close association with the great Benedictine abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos, whose monks cut a record of Gregorian chant a few years ago that went platinum. We chanted Gregorian here too, she said, giving no hint of what she was up to. Perhaps I would like to see the choir?

I followed this tiny figure in sweeping black robes through the unlit cloister, a marble-floored gallery with arched windows built around a courtyard, and stepped into the choir. An iron grille screened it off from the sanctuary, which was dominated by an extravagant Baroque centrepiece depicting Jesus surrounded by the saints of the order. According to legend, in the year 836, the 300 nuns who then lived here topped off their noses to protect their chastity from invading Moors. The soldiers arrived the next day, chopped off the women's heads and burned down the abbey. All 300 were made virgin-martyrs but the convent remained in ruins until the 12th century, when a nobleman by the name of Count Fernández Manrique paid to have it rebuilt.

And then the nun, interrupting my reverie, handed me an open psalter bearing the legend of Santo Domingo de Silos. At that moment I realised I'd been invited to join them in singing the night office. Now this was an impossibility, considering that I'm practically tone deaf and my knowledge of Latin is patchy; worst of all, I'm not even a Christian. At one point it occurred to me that I should get the hell out of there. But by that time the organist had arrived. The other choristers soon followed, women as small and gaunt as the scrub oak that dotted the hillside. And then the office began. In Latin we chanted:

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

That night I slept very well indeed. The monastery of San Salvador (00 34 947 45 0209), in the village of Palacios de Benaver, is a three-hour drive from Madrid. Single rooms cost 3,500 pesetas a night, doubles 5,000, all meals included. Castilla-León tourist board: 00 34 902 203030.

RED CHANNEL

Foreign Office advice for travel in Kenya

"The Samburu, Shaba and Masai Mara game reserves have experienced incidents of banditry. A British visitor was killed in a private game sanctuary at a country club outside Nairobi. Tourists wishing to visit these reserves should be accompanied by guards or tour operators."

A general election took place in Kenya on 29 and 30 December 1997. Political meetings and demonstrations, which can be violent, are likely to continue and should be avoided.

Politically motivated ethnic clashes have occurred in Laikipia and Nakuru districts. A night curfew has been imposed in these districts, including Nakuru town, from 9pm to 6am. Visitors should exercise extreme caution in these areas.

Except as otherwise indicated, game reserves and other tourist areas are generally safe, but muggings and armed attacks can occur anywhere and at any time, particularly in Nairobi and Mombasa. Be alert at all times. Do not accept food or drink from strangers. Avoid travelling after dark and in isolated places, particularly empty beaches. Do not carry valuables or wear jewellery in public places.

Avoid the North Eastern Province, the Tana River district of Coast Province and the Isiolo and Marsabit districts of Eastern Province where cattle raids are frequent.

Foreign Office travel advice is available on BBC2 (Ceefax) p 470 and can be accessed on <http://www.fco.gov.uk/>, or call 0171-238 4503.

HIGH ROAD FROM HEATHROW

You want to spend £640 on a day's outing? Sign up for the 100-minute "flight to nowhere" on Concorde, operated by Goodwood Travel (01227 763336). It departs on 22 March or 5 April. You get a three-course champagne meal and a trip to the cockpit.

LOW ROAD FROM HEATHROW

Or, if you are in generous mood, take four friends to Rome for the day – and still have £15 change. Aeroscope (01608 650103) is offering day trips to Rome on Alitalia for £125 per person, including a free travel card for the Italian capital. Departing at 7.20am, you get nine hours in Rome. The offer runs until the end of March.

A roam with a view

Next week the Government is expected to publish its long awaited consultation paper on extending countryside access. David Foster talks to those with a stake in the debate, and charts the failure of previous attempts to enlarge the 'right to roam'



A walk on the wild side ... but post-war attempts to open up vast tracts of land to ramblers have become bogged down

Photograph: Christopher Jones

Nip into any decent bookshop and for around £5 you can pick up an Ordnance Survey map. It is your key to local footpaths, part of a national network extending for more than 100,000 miles.

The same maps also show National Parks. But 50 years ago, things were very different: National Parks were still in the future, and although OS maps did mark some footpaths, their legal status was unclear.

In 1949 came the National Parks and Access of the Countryside Act. As well as enabling the creation of National Parks, the Act required local authorities in England and Wales to produce "definitive maps" of local rights of way open to everyone.

However, the Act was expected to do more. Councils also had to consider making agreements with landowners that would open up vast areas of countryside for people to roam at will. In the absence of agreement, a council could make an access order - if they paid compensation to the landowner. But access maps only had to be prepared if access areas were actually established and, somehow, this didn't happen.

Only five out of 107 local authorities recently surveyed by the Ramblers' Association actually have such maps. In short, the survey concludes that outside the

National Parks, the Act "had only a marginal effect" and the open country provisions "never became a vital part of [the] culture of recreation provision".

The problem, says Anthony Bosanquet, deputy president of the Country Landowners' Association (CLA), is that "local authorities have been reluctant to use their powers because of a lack of finance".

Stephen Jenkinson, of the Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPROW) agrees: "In the Peak District they've opened up 80 square miles of extra access," he says. "That's only a tenth of the area of the Snowdonia National Park, but the annual cost of compensation is £250,000."

So much for history. Labour's manifesto promised "greater freedom for people to explore our open countryside", and last autumn the environment minister, Michael Meacher, told a Ramblers' Association meeting that "the right to roam is a central part of our environmental programme... I anticipate that we will be preparing a bill... for the [parliamentary] session which begins in October 1998."

Landowners also want to see more access, though they believe that legislation is unnecessary. In November 1996, the CLA's Access 2000 conference established a policy to "increase the quality, quantity

and diversity of access" by voluntary rather than statutory methods.

Since then the CLA has appointed an access adviser, and is producing an access register listing all non-statutory access provided by their members. Among other benefits, says Mr Bosanquet, this should address the long-standing issue of access that has been granted in return for tax exemptions. "There is no question at all that when a bargain has been struck with the taxpayer, then the public must be aware of where that access is." His only reservation is that an individual's tax affairs must remain confidential.

Mr Jenkinson welcomes the new access register. "My only worry is that without access to Inland Revenue records, they're relying on voluntary disclosure by landowners." But Kate Ashbrook, chair of the Ramblers' Association, is sceptical. "What the CLA has published so far isn't new - much of it is long-established, customary access. There is very little additional access being generated. But in any case, voluntary access would just be a hotch-potch; it won't be shown on OS maps, and the public won't know where it is."

If there is wide agreement about the need to open up more countryside, there are sharp differences of opinion about the

practicalities - and the costs. Mr Bosanquet believes that a statutory right to roam "would undoubtedly involve compensation for loss of ownership rights" and he questions whether it would be either better or cheaper "than updating the 1949 Act to deal with people who won't fall into line" with a voluntary approach.

Ms Ashbrook disagrees. "We don't think open access needs the same sort of funding as footpaths. We don't expect that councils would need to produce maps. In most cases there will be no dispute about whether the land falls within the new definition." Most moorland, she argues, is pretty clear cut; and while there are problems defining downland, the Ramblers are helping with ideas to make things clearer.

The future depends on the results of the Government's consultation exercise, but any new legislation will probably be administered by members of IPROW.

"Giving people quality information about access is vital," says Mr Jenkinson - and that will involve some costs. Walkers also need alerting to the seasonal and environmental restrictions that everyone agrees will be necessary. "The problem isn't managing the people who use the access," he says. "The problem is managing the people who abuse it."

NATURE NOTE

Carrion crows are already starting to stake out their breeding sites. Especially in the early mornings, they proclaim individual territories with long, harsh calls of "kaaark, kaaark", repeated again and again. Any time now they will start to build their nests, which are big, clumsy constructions of sticks, thickly lined with hair or wool, and often placed on top of old nests or squirrels' dreys. Voracious predators, equipped with powerful beaks, crows are more destructive in spring, when they - besides carrion - the eggs and chicks of other birds. A famous photograph taken by a Game Conservancy researcher on Salisbury Plain shows the shells of more than 50 pheasant and partridge eggs scattered under one crow's nest. They also crack open hard-shelled tibbles such as crabs and walnuts by dropping them from a height, and even gouge out the eyes of ewes which have gone down while lambing and are still alive but too weak to stand. Crows can be distinguished from rooks by the



fact that they tend to be solitary, and are totally black; rooks live and nest in large flocks, and have a white patch around the base of the beak. Also, crows are slightly larger, with slower, heavier wing-beats.

Duff Hart-Davis

Acts of God and other risks

In the belfry of his church, Duff Hart-Davis ponders the worst case scenario

I fear that we are inclined to take the fabric of our village church for granted. There the stone building stands on the hillside, apparently as solid as the rock on which it is founded, and apparently as un-

changing. Yet nothing brings its potential frailties more sharply into focus than a visit from a representative of the ecclesiastical insurance company.

When I and my fellow

church-warden met him for a routine inspection, I decided to make a job of it and look into the bell loft, which is rarely visited because the only access is through a small door set into the wall of the tower 20ft above the ground.

I therefore took along an extending aluminium ladder, and walked down the lane with it balanced fore and aft on my shoulders, head through the rungs. This drew looks of astonishment from several passing hikers, who clearly thought that a lunatic had been set at large from some nearby institution with a special neck-brace to keep him out of mischief.

Our insurance man was waiting for us, a lively and articulate fellow, smartly turned out in a suit and a dark blue overcoat. Almost his first words were: "As you probably know, 65 per cent of all church fires are started by arsonists."

"Really?" I said. "Yes. And 25 per cent by lightning strikes." Warning to his theme, he rattled cheerfully on: "If someone set fire to this church, he wouldn't start just one blaze. He'd start several. One here under the tower, one at the altar end, maybe one under the organ. The result usually is that the building is engulfed in flames before the fire brigade can reach the scene."

"You've got a good deal of wood in here, haven't you? All these pews, the screen, the roof timbers, the floors in the tower ... Stained glass, too, I see. Of course, flames tend to go out through win-

dows and up through the roof. So you'd lose the roof and all the windows."

At first I thought he was pitching things rather high. Then I saw that he was only being realistic, and looking at the worst possible scenario.

As he measured and noted, I kept thinking of the lightning bolt that streaked down during a thunderstorm two summers ago and missed the church by the length of a cricket pitch. The strike, which I happened to witness from across the valley, exploded a giant cedar growing in the graveyard, and flung 100lb chunks of wood several hundred yards uphill.

The discharge of energy was so phenomenal that I doubt whether the church, for all its copper conductors, could have withstood it. Even without a direct hit, we had to pay £12,000 to have the shattered tree removed and £500 to rebuild a stone wall smashed by the falling trunk, so we were glad we could make an insurance claim.

"Slip and trip," the inspector was saying. "That's another thing you've got to look out for." He explained that because people are increasingly litigious these days, and tend to sue for damages at the slightest setback to their persons or property, it is advisable to have no loose carpets, hidden steps or other hazards over which visitors may stumble.

We scored fairly high on that front, less well on the fire-extinguishers, which were past their test-by date. One big point in our favour was that

we had renewed the entire electrical system only two years earlier. When we came to the vestry, we were able to demonstrate our contention that the church contains nothing of value.

One key question was, "Do you keep the building locked?" The answer was, "In winter, yes, but not in summer." I feared that this policy might bring criticism, but no - our inspector found it reasonable that tourists should have access to the building.

When it came to the tower, I was the only person who went up the ladder. I was glad to report that the first little room was dry and sound. A rusty iron ladder led up to the chamber housing the single bell, and although it is seldom rung these days, the bearings at either end of the spindle were well greased. By giving the drive-wheel a sudden turn, I sent one baritone chime booming out over the valley.

Up another level, and out through a pop-hole, I gained access to the roof inside the battlements. From there I could look out on level terms at two large pines, which I knew that inspector had marked down as a potential threat because, if they blow over in a westerly gale, they may crash into the tower.

Clanking home with my ladder, I felt sure he would raise our premium, which is already more than £500 a year, and a considerable burden for a parish with fewer than 20 households. But I see that we need to pay it - and after all those revelations, I am glad that we do.

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THE INDEPENDENT

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CUTTINGS

Robert Milne, who has 20 years of self-sufficient organic gardening behind him, is offering a kitchen garden design service. You decide what you want to grow. He sends a plan showing how it will all best fit in, and the best way to rotate the crops. He will also advise on (or undertake, if it is not too far from his base) the pruning of fruit trees. He is at 57 Foley Street, Hereford HR1 2SCQ (01432 279740).

Last week Brian Glover of London wrote in support of the rose 'Agnes' which he thought I was treating unfairly. Karen Williams, of Great Bentley, Essex, feels the same way. "My 'Agnes' rose is about eight years old and is a great favourite," she writes. "It is too near a deodar cedar and probably endures a poor soil, which I have done very little to improve. It also spends much of each day in shade. It seems to like these difficult conditions, although I admit it is not a very good-looking plant."

"But each year it has at least 20 beautiful flowers, and I like to cut them for the house, because the perfume is wonderful, a kind of spicy lemon, unlike the perfume of any other rose I have grown."

I began to feel I should not have dispatched my 'Agnes' to the bonfire, despite having waited 15 years in vain for a flower. I went to the place where it had been in the garden, to say sorry to its ghost. There, sprouting with massive insouciance, were four fat new suckers of the recalcitrant rose. It made me laugh. I feel that, like the Turnstone pigs, the rose has earned a reprieve. But whether the shock will now make it flower remains to be seen.

Do you make sourdough bread? Are you as interested in your vinegar as you are in your olive oil? If yes, then you should get hold of the catalogue produced by Future Foods, which offers an extraordinary range of out-of-the-way things to grow. Sourdough "Tunnel Hill" comes highly recommended from California. It's a culture that makes bread rise, like yeast, but it works more slowly and breaks down carbohydrates in the flour to make bread more digestible. A starter kit costs £7.50.

Future Foods can also supply the fermenting culture that turns soya bean or barley into Japanese miso. Japanese cooks make a wide range of misos by mixing spores of the fungus *Aspergillus oryzae* with cooked soya beans or grains of various kinds. This koji then continues with a secondary fermentation which turns it into miso, shoyu or tamari. Kits are £7.50 each.

The catalogue also includes a wide range of unusual vegetables and fruit: Chinese greens, serpent garlic, yams (must be kept frost free), saffron crocus, buckberries, wineberries and other treats. For a copy, send £1 to Future Foods, PO Box 1564, Wedmore, Somerset BS28 4DP.

The English Gardening School will be running a one-day course on "down-to-earth gardening" on Monday 2 March (10.30am-3.30pm). Dr Lesley Rosser gives the lowdown on soil management, choice of plants, weed control and other practical matters. The day costs £70.50. For further information on this and other courses, contact the English Gardening School at the Chelsea Physic Garden, 66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS (0171-352 4347).

Anna Pavord

Shoots to kill

Cutting new growth may seem drastic, writes Anna Pavord, but you've got to be cruel to be kind

If anybody mentions global warming to me again, I'll scream. After a stretch of the wettest and most unpleasant winter months I can remember for a long time - mud to the horizon - I think we deserved a couple of fine, warm days to remind ourselves why we ever thought we liked gardening. Valentine's weekend was a miracle. I don't care if we have to pay for it with late frosts in May, as the doom merchants predict. Last Saturday, I stood among the aconites spreadeagled in the sun, and sniffed like a truffle hound the smell of the viburnum on the other side of the path. "Yes!" I thought. "Here we go again."

It was such an extraordinary sensation, feeling the sun warm on my back, I could easily have frittered the whole day away. I lifted up snowdrops to look at the odd green punctuation marks on the inner petals. I admired the slaty, dark satin colours of the hellebores. I resolved, once again, to divide the blue primroses. But, although I tried hard to maintain the tunnel vision that is so essential in a gardener, it was horribly obvious that there was a vast backlog of work.

Much of it had to do with pruning. February is the time to tackle the later-flowering clematis and cut them down to within 18in of the ground. They won't die if you don't, but if you leave them to their own devices, they tend to flower in a bundle high up on the wall or support, leaving you to look into a bird's-nest tangle of bare stems.

If you have planted a late-flowering clematis such as *C. viticella* to run through an earlier-flowering shrub, or to accompany a rose, the growth may become so vigorous that the host shrub is suffocated. By clearing out the carapace of clematis each season, you give the supporting shrub breathing-space. It can go ahead with its own performance untrammelled, before the clinging clematis smothers it up.

If you have planted clematis to accompany a rose on a pergola, or against a wall, the rose itself will probably need pruning now, which, again, means you have to do something about the clematis. I certainly needed to do some work on the 'Constance Spry' rose planted on the south front of the house, which was tangled up with a vigorous *Clematis 'Jackmanii Superba'*.

'Constance Spry' is usually described as a shrub rose, but it will easily get to 20ft if it has support. It was bred by David Austin in 1961, so in rose terms it is a new arrival, but it looks old, with big, cabbagey double flowers of a not-too-sickly pink. Austin calls it "myrrh-scented". I'd always wondered what myrrh smelt like.

The rose was doing wonders for any acrobat who happened to be hanging out of our attic window, but not much for anyone else. Fortunately the clematis was the type that responds to February pruning. I cut all its stems down first, although I felt like a murderer chucking away all the plump buds that were already springing up. Once the

clematis was out of the way, I could see more clearly what to do with the rose. Some of the longest growths had to be cut back to about 4ft.

Other stems I pulled down, arching them against the wall as near to horizontal as they would go. This brought the bulk of the rose down towards eye level. It will also persuade the stems to flower more freely than if they were vertical. Some roses are too stiff to treat like this, but 'Constance Spry' has relatively unthorny, pliable stems.

If *C. macropetala* or *C. alpina* had been rambling through the 'Constance Spry' rose, the whole job would have been much trickier. Both of those clematis flower quite early, during April and May. They are already bursting with growth, and do not need regular pruning. It would have been difficult to restrain the rose without cutting back the clematis, but if it had been one of the early ones, we would have lost this season's flowering. You need to bear this in mind when you pair clematis with other climbers.

Clematis can be divided into three groups - early, mid- and late-season - which dictate whether or not they should be pruned. Early-flowering ones need no pruning, mid-season ones can be lightly pruned, late-flowering ones need cutting back hard, to within 18in of the ground.

But rules are made to be broken. If an early-flowering *Clematis montana* has got rampantly out of hand, as they sometimes do, then I would not hesitate to take the knife to it immediately it had

finished flowering. Conversely, if I followed the rules then I would prune our yellow, September-flowering *Clematis orientalis* every year, but I don't. It does a good job of softening a bare stone wall, and does not get in the way of any other plants. So it's often left for five or six years before it is brought to heel. And rejuvenated.

That is another good reason for pruning. Young growths often flower better and with bigger flowers than old ones, which is why buddleia is usually pruned every year about now. No great thunderbolt will fall if you forget to tackle it, but the shrub, a coarse grower at the best of times, will get bigger than it deserves, and the long panicles of bloom will not be as showy as they should be.

Buddleia is difficult to kill, which is comforting to know when you are a new gardener cruising round it wondering where to plunge in the knife. If it is an established bush, it will already have four or five main stems, all of which need to be cut hard back. There will usually be a bright, precocious bud, already breaking into leaf, to give you a lead. Cut above this, trusting it to zoom away as a strong new shoot.

Clematis viticella 'Abundance'
Photograph: Howard Rice/
Garden Picture Library



Pruning has the effect of kick-starting plants into new growth and the general rule is to do it immediately a shrub has finished flowering. The ones that need attention now, though, are mostly those that flower in late summer. You don't prune them in autumn, because you don't want to encourage new growth that may be caught by frost. You leave them to tick over in winter, but prune them as early as you dare towards the beginning of spring. Then they have time to build up new flowering stems by summer.

Like buddleia, caryopteris flowers in August and September, so needs pruning soon. It is a compact shrub, rarely as much as 4ft high and wide, with greyish-green leaves and blue flowers, particularly good in the variety 'Kew Blue'. Cut the weakest, scraggiest stems out entirely at ground level and prune the other stems back hard, cutting just above a strong shoot. In severe winters, the top growth is often cut back by frost. Your "pruning" will in fact be clearing away wood that is already dead.

Hard pruning is what makes spiraeas, such as *S. x bumalda* and *S. japonica*, perform most spectacularly in July and August. One of the best is 'Anthony Waterer', with leaves splashed with pink and cream among the flat, crimson flowers. For the biggest flowers, be brutal. Prune all the stems down to within 3in or 4in of the ground.

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Classified Advertising
also appears on page 12.

A natural high

Strap on your crampons and practise your bum slides. Eric Kendall leads the way

The wind ripped at my body, the rain beat into my face and the storm howled around the surrounding peaks. For a terrifying moment, I thought I was in the opening paragraph of a travel piece on the perils of booking a trek with an operator who is not Abta-affiliated. In fact, I was just having a normal day out on a winter mountaineering course in the Western Highlands.

Winter in the hills promises unique thrills and challenges, but demands much more than summer walking. From December to April, you're almost bound to reach freezing conditions at some point up a mountain, even in Britain. It means that being on the hills rather than the valleys involves mountaineering skills, at least as a back-up, even if you think you're just going for "a walk". Snow, ice, and the potential for avalanches will all feature.

It can also mean stunning scenery and access to different (often more direct) routes to the peaks; with the right snow cover you can climb gullies which cascade with crumbling rock in summer. The motivation in winter is certainly different. "Because it's there" hardly applies. In bad conditions it's more "To see if it's there".

The key to winter mountaineering is good judgement and risk assessment, getting input from all the members of a group, not simply leaving decisions to an "expert". It's vital for everyone to remember that they're not in the SAS, and that the trip doesn't have to be either miserable or a near-death experience for it to be a successful outing. The basics are common sense. Even before you step outside in the morning, detailed weather forecasts are available by phone or fax, along with avalanche reports, which can save a long hike into an unsuitable area. Not only is legwork minimised, but you're not exposed to the dangerous instinct to carry on regardless, which increases in direct proportion to the amount of effort you've put into getting there.

At the snow line, key skills training starts with ice axe arrests - lots of sliding wetly on your backside (beginner), head first on your front (intermediate) and head first flat on your back (advanced/suicidal). The theory is to imitate a fall on a slope, bringing yourself to a rapid halt by digging your axe into the snow. Get it wrong, and you risk neatly planting your axe while you continue on your way. To cope

with this eventuality you also practise the digging-your-axe-in technique, the alpine equivalent of a drowning man clutching at driftwood.

Next on the agenda is avalanche prediction. It's a huge subject, and well worth paying close attention to. Along with daily bulletins posted locally as a guide to conditions, there's also the obvious but often overlooked point that if you can see an avalanche, then the risk of more avalanches is high. Looking around you on the hill can tell you more than all the snow science ever written. Perhaps the most relevant thing to remember is that you yourself are the most likely trigger for any avalanche that may come your way.

For analysing specific slopes, and to warm up after ice-axe drill, the Rutschblock test is ideal. Lots of digging with spade, ski or ice-axe is involved, to isolate a representative section of a slope. Then you can determine the stability of the snow by progressively loading the block until it slides, which gives a reasonable impression of how the slope as a whole will react to your walking on it. On a scale of one to seven, one means run like hell - which would be tricky, as the snow is so prone to sliding that it collapses the moment you isolate the block from the surrounding slope. At the more reassuring end of the scale, a seven is so secure that even a yomping yeti couldn't budge it.

The final basic skill to learn is the use of crampons, which can be dangerous in the wrong hands and even more so on the wrong feet. Putting them on is half the battle, particularly in conditions where simply tightening your hood strings is an achievement. First cramponed steps turn the world on its head. Suddenly sheet ice and hard-packed snow provide a rock-solid grip, while slabs of rock give a skittish feel. Crossing a rare patch of grass, Gary from Maidstone noticed that stomping around on crampons would also do an excellent job of aerating your lawn.

Basic ropework for tougher terrain or lowering down steep faces, using ice-axe belays and snow bollards, is a further aspect of moving safely around the mountains, though, for much of the time, winter walking and mountaineering is unprotected, relying on increasing care in relation to the degree of exposure. Do look down, not to give yourself an attack of vertigo, but so that you realise the stakes are about

as high as you are. And for anyone who thinks all this is just about the serious matter of getting to the top, that's only half the story. Coming down the other side can be at least as demanding, but if you're lucky, it may afford an ice-axe-controlled bum-slide that makes the Cresta Run look like a walk in the park.

Where to learn, and what you need

The National Mountain Centre, Plas Y Brenin (01690 720214) offers some of the best training facilities and instruction available. They run winter courses in Wales, Scotland and the Alps. Comprehensive notes are supplied which detail experience needed and equipment required; in many cases gear is available on loan. The Scottish National Sports Centre, Glenmore Lodge (01479 861256) offers a similar programme based at Aviemore.

What you take into the mountains is fundamental to your comfort and safety. Protective clothing doesn't have to be Gore-Tex, though many manufacturers use this fabric for their top-of-the-range gear. Most important are the design and fit of the garments. Lowe Alpine use their own breathable fabric, Triplepoint Ceramic, and Paramo clothing relies on regular treatment of non-waterproof fabrics for optimum breathability and water-resistance.

Boots need to be both water-resistant and suitable for use with crampons. Plastic shelled boots are frequently used, but tend to be uncomfortable if worn day in, day out. Salomon now produce leather mountaineering boots (the Super Mountain range) which include lots of innovations, derived in part from their ski-boot experience. A boot which sprouts crampons from the sole unit at the touch of a button (after Rosa Kleb in *From Russia With Love*) is keenly awaited.

For both clothing and specialist climbing hardware, the best advice is available from your instructors, and specialist retailers such as Cotswold Outdoor (01285 643434). Half the fun of winter mountaineering is in gratifying pent-up gear lust. But keep in mind more mundane equipment, such as gloves. We wondered, for several soggy, cold hours, why our instructors had a minimum of four pairs, until we realised that no one, other than Marigold, has managed to produce finger-bags that keep the water out for long.



Rich pickings: winter climbing is all about being prepared

Photograph: Eric Kendall

GAMES

STATISTICALLY INSIGNIFICANT WILLIAM HARTSTON

Do you spend eight hours and 42 minutes sleeping every day? Do you watch the television for about two hours and 33 minutes, and spend an hour eating at home, another hour socialising, and between 40 and 50 minutes on your personal care?

If all of these apply to you, then you are absolutely average according to the latest edition of *Social Trends*, that indispensable manual from the Office of National Statistics. But the true fascination of this document lies not in the raw figures of the individual tables of what percentage of which age group of which gender spends how long doing what. The real insights come only when you compare the figures in these tables with each other, and with other surveys that have been done in the past year.

Last year, for example, one survey found that 3 per cent of the population bath only once a week, while another totally different survey revealed that 3 per cent of married women are in love with someone other than their husbands. Quite obviously, though nobody ever pointed it out, those are the women married to the men who bath only once a week.

To take another example, 14 per cent of women, given one wish, would wish to have the housework

magically done for them. And 14 per cent of adult males have cycled in the past four weeks. They probably got on their bikes to avoid having to help their wives with the housework. That picture is sadly confirmed by the statistic of 14 per cent of fatal accidents that involve drunk drivers: it's surely those 14 per cent of women, taking to drink at the prospect of all that housework their husbands won't help them with, then getting in the car and running him down on his bike.

Only last week, there was a Valentine's Day survey commissioned by Durex which found that not only do cohabiting couples make love more often than married ones, but they spend longer over it. The precise annual figures were 135 times at 16 minutes a time for married couples and 175 times at 25 minutes each for cohabiters. That's 36 hours a year married love-making and 72 hours 55 minutes unmarried. That's a difference of 36 hours and 55 minutes. And what is 36 hours and 55 minutes? It is, as a detailed study of *Social Trends* reveals, exactly the length of working time needed for a married couple with husband only working to earn enough to pay for two road fund licences and a pint of milk. This poor man's drunken, ungrateful spouse - 20 per

cent of whose conceptions have ended in abortion. I might add - has hastily drunk a bottle of milk to try to sober up, then got in her car, for which he paid the road tax, and mercilessly run him down just because he's too exhausted to help with the washing up. And even if he was one of the 10 per cent who sometimes do the ironing, you can be pretty sure that she'd be one of the 10 per cent who find that it improves her sex life to imagine that she's with somebody else. Probably the ironing males are none other than the 10 per cent who have a female boss.

With all this evident disharmony around, how is it that 58 per cent, in the Durex survey, reported that their sex lives are good or excellent? Once again, the answer lies in a deeper analysis of the figures. For 58 per cent pay cash for their Christmas shopping, 58 per cent of mothers would rather spend Christmas Day at home than on a beach in Australia, and 58 per cent of 8- to 10-year-olds think people look good with a tan. It all adds up to such a sorry picture of rich fathers taking children on holiday to lie in the sun in Australia over Christmas, leaving wives at home to do the housework, while they have good or excellent sex with Antipodean beauties. Bastards! Running over's too good for them, I say.

PANDORA MELLY GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Richard Neave, 61, medical artist

I am not a joiner of clubs, or a player of games with other people. I tend to be more solitary, as I'm not very good at ball-games.

Ever since I can remember, I've enjoyed making things. I grew up on a little farm in Sussex, and I didn't have much in the way of toys. But I liked playing with water and I'd make dams and little water-wheels that worked, and boats.

I've always liked the vision of a model boat chugging across a pond. There is something rather romantic and lovely about the idea of a thing by itself in the middle of the water with its little engine, preferably in the half-light.

I still like building and playing with model boats. Sometimes they're built out of wood; sometimes they're kits, modified. The trouble is I don't have that much time, but I like just to be able to settle down and work at it for half a day every few months.

Making things is the game, and I suppose remaking a face is the same sort of

thing. It's all about construction, or knowing how things fit together. As a child, whenever I found a fox skull, or a rabbit's skull, I'd always pick it up and look at it, to see how it went.

I suppose this is where the business of people-watching comes in. You can stand in the Underground and count the number of people with adherent earlobes and well-defined filtrums, or whatever.

This game does have its problems, because you can offend people by staring at them. It is an extremely invasive thing to do, but I have a professional interest. Rather like an architect looking at another architect's building, and thinking: "That's nice, but the pointing is a bit rough."

If you have missed the "Meet the Ancestors" series on BBC2, on which Richard Neave reconstructed British skulls, you may catch up by reading "Making Faces" by Richard Neave and John Prag (British Museum Press, £18.99). Your film is the groove down the middle of your upper lip.

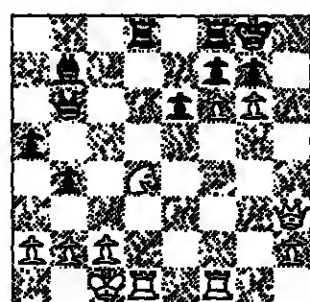
CHESS: WILLIAM HARTSTON

"When you get a position like this," Viswanathan Anand writes of the position in the diagram, "you go away feeling very pleased and have a warm glow for the next few games." The comment comes from a new book *My Best Games of Chess* (Gambit Publications, £15.99) by Anand and is typical of the irrepressible spirit of enjoyment that Anand conveys both by his moves and his comments.

In its 240 pages, the book includes 40 games and 30 combinations, played between 1986 and 1997. The annotations are a delightfully revealing mixture of deep analysis and honest reminiscences that convey a rare insight into what Anand was thinking at the time.

The diagram position comes from near the end of one of the earliest games in the book, in which Anand played White against Nimov on his way to winning the 1987 world junior championship. Black survived only one more move, resigning after 24...fxg6 25.fxg7 (25...Rxf1 26.Qh8+ Kf7 27.Rxf1+ or 25...Kxg7 26.Nxe6+ are equally hopeless).

This is the first of several games in the book in which Anand, while knowing the theory of an opening, thought up an innovation at the board. In this case it was the move 11.g4! which he says should have been answered by 11...Nxe6 12.Qg3 Nf6 13.Qxg7 Rg8 14.Qh6 when



White has the advantage, but not as much as in the game.

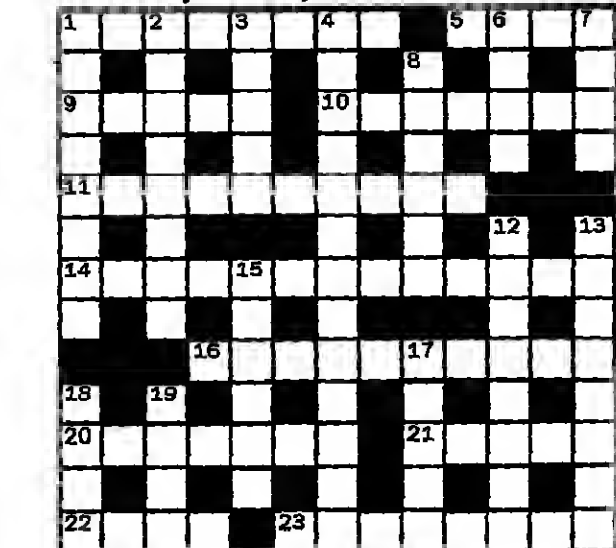
As play went, Black had to play 20...g6 leading to a poor endgame after 21.Ne5 Qxe3+ 22.Nxc3. After 21.Bxh7+! he was lost. 22...fxg6 would have been met by 24.Rxf8+ Kxf8 25.Nxe6+.

White: V Anand
Black: K Nimov
1 e4 c5 14 f4 b4
2 Nf3 e5 15 Ne2 a5
3 d4 cxd4 16 Nbd4 Nxd4
4 Nxd4 a6 17 Nxd4 Qb6
5 Bd3 Bc5 18 e5 Bb7
6 Nb3 Ba7 19 Rhf1 dxe5
7 Nc3 Nc6 20 fxe5 Rd8
8 Qe2 d6 21 Bxh7+ Kxh7
9 Be3 Bxc3 22 g6+ Kxg6
10 Qxe3 Nf6 23 Qxg3 Nf6
11 g4 b5 24 exf6 fxg6
12 0-0-0 0-0 25 fxg7 resigns
13 g5 Ne8

"The following day," Anand writes, "I was facing Agdestein" (who was the highest-rated player in the event). "I prepared as well as I could... and sat down hoping to play a good game." Not "hoping to win", note, but "hoping to play a good game".

CONCISE CROSSWORD

No. 3540 Saturday 21 February



- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Scottish clan (8) | 1 Mountain transport (5-3) |
| 5 Oil reservoir (4) | 2 Tailless domestic animals (4,4) |
| 9 Notice of intention to marry (5) | 3 Herb (5) |
| 10 Tending the sick (7) | 4 NCO (5-8) |
| 11 First-rate quality (10) | 6 Component (4) |
| 14 Life story (13) | 7 Bride's attendant (4) |
| 16 TV programmes (4,6) | 8 Shopkeeper (6) |
| 20 Well-liked (7) | 12 Fair to one's opponents (8) |
| 21 Twist and squeeze moisture from (5) | 13 Vision (8) |
| 22 Ship's complement (4) | 15 Protection from rain (coll.) (6) |
| 23 OK (3,5) | 17 Military potential (5) |
| | 18 Long poem (4) |
| | 19 Church architectural feature (4) |

Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:

ACROSS: 1 Somme, 4 Fin (Something), 7 Clem, 8 Derelict, 9 Long-drawn-out, 10 Unsur, 13 Litter, 15 Bloodthirsty, 19 Gertrude, 20 Omit, 21 Tol, 22 Salad, DOWN: 1 Salvo, 2 Manager, 3 Elder, 4 Fido, 5 Necktie, 6 Trowel, 11 Subject, 12 Radius, 14 Turnmill, 16 Octet, 17 Heeds, 18 Triad.

BRIDGE: ALAN HIRON

Game all; dealer South

North
♠ 8 6
♥ Q 10 5
♦ 10 7 6 3
♣ K 8 6 5

South
♠ K Q J 5
♥ A K J
♦ K Q J
♣ J 10 9

Oh dear! I shall have to give up offering well-meant advice and stick strictly to reporting facts. This deal produced a peevish letter from a correspondent.

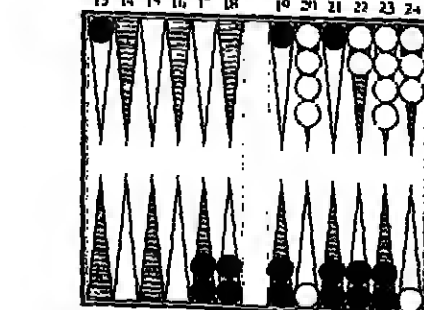
The bidding was simple: South opened 2NT and North raised to game. West led ♠ 4 against 3NT, obviously following my recent suggestion that the lead of a 10 against a no-trump contract implied a strong suit with two higher honours. Dummy followed with the six, and East (who had clearly noted my other recent point that, rather than make an apparently useless attempt with near garbage in partner's suit, it was more useful to give a count) thoughtfully played the two to suggest a three-card holding.

When ♠ 6 won, declarer still had two guards in spades and he attacked clubs. Now it was too late for the defenders to get a long card in any suit working and they came to only the four obvious tricks: a spade, a diamond and two clubs.

Yes, the lead of ♠ 10 defeats the contract when West ducks his partner's next spade return. Yes, East could have done everything that was necessary by covering S6 with his seven at trick one after which, again, West ducks the next spade return.

But the real culprit of the hand was declarer! Why? He really should have tried ♠ 8 from dummy at trick one - a play that could hardly cost and would have provided an unexpected third stopper in spades.

BACKGAMMON: CHRIS BRAY



This was problem two in the Christmas Quiz. Black to play 42. Should he play: (a) 19/13 (b) 21/15 (c) 7/5* (d) 7/5*, 13/9?

Firstly, let's check the position of the doubling cube. Black has already doubled and therefore cannot win the game by doubling White out. This normally means that Black should play more aggressively than if the cube were in the middle.

What of our four candidate plays? We can quickly eliminate play (d). If it is right to hit it will be right to hit two men, because there will be fewer return shots and because it will lead to winning more gammons. Of the two more passive plays 19/13 is safer but provides less control of the outer boards. However, getting hit by an 8 or 10 could be disastrous and roll-outs show 19/13 to be superior. So we are down to two plays, the attacking play (c), or the passive play (a). Which is right?

The answer is play (c) and it's not even close. Unless White rolls an immediate 1 or double-5 he is likely to end up with two men closed out which in turn will lead to quite a few gammon losses. If White does roll a 1 then Black is certainly in some danger but both players will have a man on the bar against a 4-point board and it will be Black's turn to roll, still making him a small favourite. On the 24 rolls where White doesn't roll a 1 or 55, Black will become a massive favourite.

Having given the cube away this is exactly the sort of move Black should be looking for to bring the game to a swift conclusion. Sadly when confronted with this problem over the board, I played the weak 19/13 and was gammoned for my pusillanimity.

First the wine, then the party

The best way to learn which wine goes with which food is by making an occasion of it, writes Sally Staples

At the end of a busy day in the office, only the stout-hearted, or those on a strict diet, may be able to face the rigours of going straight off to evening class to broaden their minds. But some courses designed to widen horizons are set in a convivial atmosphere, round a large table laden with food and wine. And this isn't a class on the art of dinner-party conversation, but one that teaches how to match different wines with food. It combines learning something useful with unwinding at the end of the day, and you don't have to think about cooking dinner afterwards.

Most of the students I met were young business women who wanted to be more adventurous when buying wine to complement their cooking, or needed to know more about selecting wine when planning to entertain clients.

Among the few men sipping and sampling was a ship broker, Jonathan, who said he was embarrassed that he always had to hand the wine list to his guest when taking clients out to lunch. "I wanted to know more about what wines went with what food, and this course does just that," he said. "It's a relaxed and informal way of learning what I need to know."

The tutor, Jackie Graves, asks the class to bring their own tasting glasses to the venue, at Westminster City School in London, and she suggests they refrain from eating spicy food at lunch time, as this impairs the palate. She begins by offering three wines for the students to taste.

On the night I visited, these were chablis premier cru, saucerre and chianti classico - all bought from Wine Rack at £7.99 a bottle.

Everyone was given a tasting sheet and invited to write down their opinion of the wine's appearance, bouquet and taste. The emphasis is not on what is right or wrong, but on what they feel they like.

"The course is for people who don't know much about wine and want to learn more," said Jackie. "We deal with wines whose names they will have come across in restaurants, and the idea is to let them explore tastes for themselves, rather than stipulate that specific wines must go with certain dishes."

Confidence visibly grew with each sip, and even the quieter members of the group started volunteering views about the flavour of gooseberries, hints of spices, or an oily, buttery texture.

Once each wine had been tasted and assessed, Jackie produced paper plates and plastic cutlery and started handing out food. First came avocado vinaigrette. Everyone was asked to taste each wine and write down which one best complemented the dish. Next was avocado with a prawn mayonnaise sauce, then cold lemon chicken, then plain roast chicken with sage and onion stuffing, and finally a garlicky duck pâté. With six bottles of wine between a dozen tasters, and plenty of food on the table, the class developed like a dinner party, with everyone joining in the discussion.

Elmar, an accountant, had signed up for her course with her flatmates, insurance broker Deborah, and Angela who works for a software company.

"I had been to wine tastings before, but it takes a difference when you are tasting food at the same time," said Elmar. "I eat out quite a lot and it makes it more interesting to know something about the wine you are drinking. Also, we all cook in the flat and it's fun to learn more about the wine we buy."

Across the table was Carlos, from Spain, who works in the catering industry and wants to be a sommelier.

Another taster with ambitions for a career in cooking was 24-year-old Emma, from Essex.

"I used to do home economics. I love cooking and I eat out a lot, so this course really suits me. Another reason I came is that I heard that loads of men come on it, and you get asked out afterwards. I suppose that's why there are so many women here - they've all heard that," she said with a rueful grin.

Jackie prefaced the evening with a run-down on each wine sampled, so students can learn that chablis is made from the chardonnay grape and saucerre from the sauvignon blanc variety. She warned against buying a cheap £4 bottle of chablis, and urged her students to go only for the premier cru. The next week's session was to include German riesling, flou and fleurie, to be tasted with goats' cheese, Parma ham and melon, lobster pâté, roast pork, and pork and mushroom meat loaf. In other sessions, Jackie will deal with pudding wines.

At the end of the evening a vote was taken on which wine best matched each dish. Jackie gave her view, but occasionally she may be outvoted by her students. It may not be traditional, but in 1998, if you prefer a chianti with avocado vinaigrette, or a chablis with sage and onion stuffing - then that's fine.

The six-week course costs between £27 and £33, plus a £50 fee for the food and wine. There are also courses on French wine appreciation. Both are run by Westminster Adult Education Services (0171-286 1900). Jackie Graves also offers classes for wine studies and the World of Wine certificate course at Kensington and Chelsea College (0171-573 5333).



Off the rails: a wider, wilder view of Kent, above; the coast at Deal, below

Photograph: John Voos

White cliffs and bover boots



Matthew Brace continues his series on great short railway journeys with a trip through the seamy side of Kent



In contrast to the other train journeys in this series, this week's route presents the armchair traveller with the grittier side of life in Britain. No one would argue that this trip is picturesque, though it does open up part of the South-east that is definitely not on the tourist track. To add to your woes, you will have to change trains at Ramsgate in order to complete the trail to our journey's end at Margate.

The trip starts handsomely enough, with the white cliffs of Folkestone and Dover standing proudly in the sunlight. They are so quintessentially English, they almost make homecoming ferry passengers burst into choruses of "Land of Hope and Glory" as they arrive from the Continent. Taking a train journey along this famous coast, however, you realise that the celebrated cliffs are not as high and mighty as they sometimes seem.

Leaving Folkestone en route to Dover, the train bows along next to the Channel shore, with France visible on a clear day. The cliffs rising to the landward side looked only about 100ft high, a fraction of the height they appear from out at sea. Along the track, big chunks of chalk that have become

dislodged are propped up against wire mesh fences where they lie looking bizarrely like blocks of feta cheese.

For a coastal route, this short train journey offers surprisingly few sea views. You can see the waves as you approach the impressive bulk of Dover Castle, but they soon disappear behind the rooftops of the town. Instead, the track winds inland through tunnels cut into the chalk.

Most of Kent is cosy, characterised by oast-houses and small villages, but the landscape on this extreme eastern edge is uncharacteristically flat and deserted. It is more akin to the countryside across the Channel. Anyone who has travelled on the Eurostar to Paris will have noticed the difference between the relatively cluttered appearance of central Kent, with its hedges, fields and settlements, and the vast, unpopulated expanses of Normandy. If the Eurostar followed this route through the east of the county before submerging, passengers would get a much better idea of the sort of scenery to expect in France.

Martin Mill is the first station past Dover, after

which the train runs through wide, chalky fields. Earlier this week, spring was waiting in the wings: buds looked almost ready to burst, the smell of early blossom filled the air and seagulls were sunbathing in the warm, coastal light. Children at a small gypsy encampment stopped hanging out the family washing and waved at us as we passed.

From the train you do not see much of the small town of Walmer, other than modern, brutal-looking housing estates. But Walmer is well worth noting, for it has a significant place in history: this was where Julius Caesar is believed to have stepped on British soil for the first time.

After the station here, the train heads for Deal, where sheep graze on rugby pitches in the town centre, and then on to Sandwich, through more fen-like fields. Sandwich has a pretty church and clapperboard houses, common in this part of Britain, and a whitewashed windmill on the outskirts of town. Farther down the line is its modern equivalent, a wind turbine.

The train from Folkestone and Dover ends at Ramsgate, where you must change platforms and

catch a London train that starts here and heads for Victoria station. It was appropriate that I found myself squeezed in among a group of middle-aged, overweight football fans heading for a London derby between Arsenal and Chelsea. This part of Kent has often been described as being Cockneyfied beyond all recognition. "It was all right before it got full of London scum," I later overheard one native Margate resident say.

The fans talked about how well the "boys" would do, and whether they would get to Wembley this year - and they scolded a younger member of the group for not bringing enough bags of crisps to munch. They were harmless enough, but I was glad I met them as they were cracking open their first cans of beer, and not as they were coming home later that night. They chatted through Broadstairs, once home to Charles Dickens, and into Margate, where I got off and left them to it.

It is a long time since people came to Margate for health reasons. A sea-bathing infirmary was established here in the 18th century, when it was widely thought that salt water was good for the body - both for bathing in and for drinking. Since then Margate has developed a different, and off-putting, reputation. During the Seventies and Eighties it was the battlefield for many a skinhead scrap, and today it still has an air of tension and violence.

After a bag of chips, a stroll through Margate's dirty streets and a swift pint in a run-down pub where former addicts were comparing hard drug substitutes while their children played under the tables, I ran for the next train. This is a part of Kent tourists do not usually see, and now I know why.

On the footplate
When to go: trains run about once an hour and the journey takes half-an-hour

Who to call: National Rail Enquiries 0345 484950
How much: adult day return £6.10, children (under 16) day return £3.05

What to see: hop off at Broadstairs to look at Dickens's house



WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

If you're not busy flipping pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, you could pop in to the Fox in Corfe Castle, Dorset, and have a pint of Bishop's Tipton with the apprentices of the Purbeck Marblers and Stonecutters. Join them at midday as they wait to be admitted to the ancient order. After a ceremony that involves a penny loaf and a peppercorn, the Marblers play a game of football to celebrate their right to transport stone from the Purbeck quarries to Poole. 24 Feb, The Fox, Corfe Castle, Dorset (01929 480449). Sally Kindberg

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Lipinski's art makes lasting impression

Mike Rowbottom
reports from Nagano

AN all-American drama played itself out to an astonishing denouement in the women's figure skating final here last night. Michelle Kwan, the gold medal favourite and media darling, was the winner; but Tara Lipinski, the sequinned waif, was the winner.

Looking on as the 15-year-old Lipinski took the title with an exuberant and almost faultless performance, one experienced American skating observer spoke for a nation. "Oh my God," he said. "Oh my God. Un. Believable."

After her sublime performance at last month's US Championships in Philadelphia, where she had recaptured her title from Lipinski, the 17-year-old Kwan arrived here as most people's choice for the title. It was widely assumed that, if she made no mistakes, the gold was hers.

As she left the ice last night, she was smiling broadly. The bouquets came hounding onto the ice from all around the arena. Unlike in Philadelphia, where she had scored 15 maximum 6.0 marks, the judges were more conservative - she had nine out of nine 5.9s for artistic impression, but her technical merit marks were a little down - four 5.8s and five 5.7s.

Nevertheless, as she left the arena, it seemed she had done enough to realise the goal to which she has dedicated herself for so many years. Lipinski, who succeeded Kwao as world champion last year, had fallen in the US championships. But this time she was unfaltering - radiant, even. As she registered each jump and combination, her face broke into an expression of delight.

In the past, she has been criticised for being a robotic acro-

bat without artistic merit. Last night her performance had, if not the grace of Kwan, then an expression of real emotion. At the end of her performance, she careened into the centre of the arena like a kid racing to open her Christmas presents, shaking her fists in triumph.

Back in the kiss and tell section, her expression as the first line of judges' marks, for technical merit, came up, was momentarily one of terror. They were significantly better than Kwan's - six 5.9s, three 5.8s - and it was as if the enormity of what she was about to have confirmed suddenly hit her.

The next row of figures for

Kwan said she had come off the ice happy with her own performance, but accepted that it had not matched her inspirational effort at last month's national championships. "In Philadelphia I was more free, I was flying," she said. "Tonight I was more cautious. I took my time and did one thing at a time. It seemed like I was in my own world, like I didn't open up and really let go."

In contrast, Lipinski emoted from the start. "It was one of the best performances I have ever given, both technically and emotionally," she said. Kwan did not contest the award of the title - but then she had not seen Lipinski skating, choosing to talk to her mother instead.

"There was disappointment when I saw Tara's marks," she said. "And a few tears. But I'm going to keep fighting. I'll be at the 2002 Olympics, so there is one more shot. I will only be 21 - who knows? But I think I can walk away from her happy. Because - c'est la vie, right? However hard you work, you cannot guarantee you are going to win gold. The medal isn't the colour I wanted, but I'll take it."

The spectacle was likely to have been a gold medal one as far as the US TV rights holders to the Games, CBS, were concerned. After seeing the US and Canada drop out of contention for tomorrow's ice hockey final, they needed all the ratings they could get.

When Lipinski was just two years old, her father, Jack, recalled last night, she watched the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles on TV. Seeing a medal ceremony, she took a copperware bowl, turned it upside down and stood on top of it. "She asked her mum for flowers and a ribbon," Jack Lipinski said. "She didn't know there was a medal."



artistic impression - four 5.9s, five 5.8s - and a 6-3 split decision in her favour installed her as the youngest individual gold medalist in Winter Games history. She is 60 days younger than Sonja Henie was when she won this title in 1928.

"I didn't think about winning, or about beating anybody," Lipinski said. "I just didn't want to come off the ice disappointed. I don't remember running at the end. I was just so happy at the time, because it was the Olympics, and I had skated great."

Coming into last night's free programme in second place after Wednesday's short programme had worked in her favour. "I always like to be the underdog," she said. "I was very motivated."



Cool customer: Tara Lipinski on her way to making history in the women's figure skating final

Photograph: AFP

Czechs ensure gold will elude Gretzky after shoot-out win

THE Czech Republic, conquerors of the stellar United States ice hockey team, yesterday accounted for another of the game's giants when they defeated Canada 2-1 in a shoot-out after overtime in the semi-final.

To do this, they also reduced one of the game's greats, Wayne Gretzky, to a silent, dejected figure. The greatest scorer in ice hockey history will probably never win the one major prize he does not already possess: an Olympic gold medal.

"It's devastating. It's the worst feeling in the world," Gretzky said yesterday, talking slowly as he choked back tears. "Truth of the matter is, it's probably my last international competition. I guess a gold medal wasn't on the cards for my career."

After Dominik Hasek had thwarted Canada's Brendan Shanahan, the Czechs milled their goaltender in celebration while the Canadians consoling their goalie, Patrick Roy. It was about a minute before Gretzky moved. Then he slowly got up and joined his team-mates for the post-game handshake.

He had his first chance at an Olympic gold medal because the NHL, for the first time, let its players participate. Now, the best he can do is win a bronze today. "Words can't even describe how bad I feel," said the 37-year-old Gretzky, who holds or shares 61 NHL records and has won four Stanley Cups. "Each and every time I put on that Canadian sweater, I'm proud. This is so tough."

His American NHL colleagues clearly found defeat tougher still. United States players smashed windows and damaged Olympic village rooms in the wake of the team's early exit from the tournament, police and tournament officials have announced.

However, officials were not planning to file criminal charges but will seek financial compensation for damages from the incident, which took place less than three hours after the "Dream Team" lost 4-1 to the Czechs in the quarter-finals.

Olympic village officials had tried to assess the damage on Wednesday night after the US delegation leader reported the incident, but respected a request that they wait until the athletes had left the village. Exactly how many players were involved and the extent of the damage was not certain, spokesman added.

This was not the first case of vandalism at these Games: the Austrian snowboarding world champion, Martin Freudenstein, had his Games accreditation revoked by delegation officials after trashing his hotel room in the wake of a disappointing Olympic showing.

Having a smashing time yesterday, in the strictly legal sense, was the Italian Deborah Compagnoni, who went into the Olympic record books when she won the women's giant slalom for her third gold medal in three successive Games.

The 27-year-old won in combined time of 2min 50.59s to finish more than a 1.5s ahead of second-placed Alexandra Meissnitzer of Austria as she became the first female Alpine skier to manage such an Olympic run.

Compagnoni won her first gold in the Super-G at the giant slalom two years later in Lillehammer before yesterday's success.

Olsson and crew rise to occasion

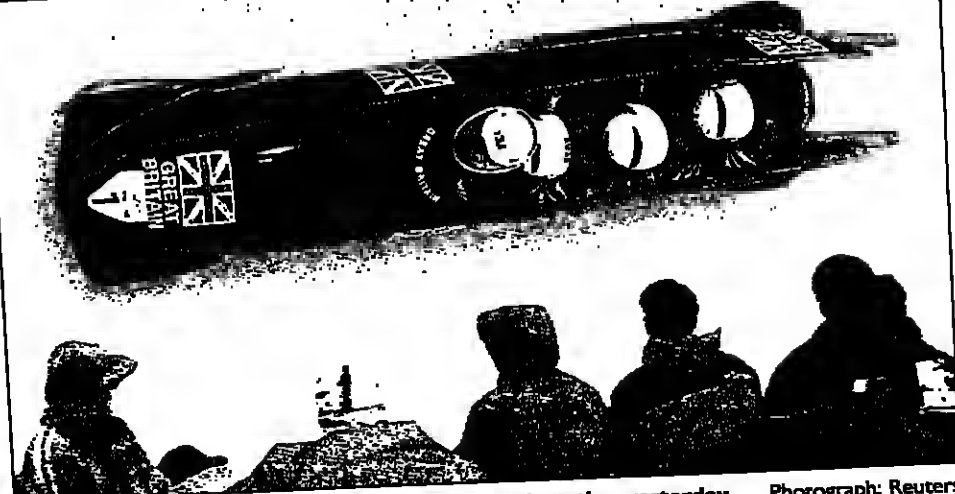
By Chris Moore
in Nagano

IN the land of the Rising Sun, Sean Olsson still had to endure the longest night of his bobsleight career knowing Britain's first medal of the Winter Olympics was within grasp. The British champion and his Zanussi crew of fellow paratrooper Dean Ward, "civvy" Courtney Rumbolt and Royal Marine Paul Atwood, were in second place overnight in the four-man competition after heavy rain forced the cancellation of yesterday's second run on Nagano's Spiral track.

And for once, rain was good news for British sporting aspirations because a three-run race offers more of an advantage to crews already in the medal positions than those looking to catch up.

Olsson had promised that the British quartet would be "awesome" off the top and he was true to his word as they smashed the previous start record from the No 1 slot in the draw.

Their time over the first 50 metres of 4.83 seconds was



The British bobsleigh crew, led by Sean Olsson, in action yesterday

Photograph: Reuters

only bettered by Germany's Christoph Langen who clocked a staggering 4.78 seconds on his way to snatching the lead in a new track record time of 52.70.

But Olsson, who produced the run of his life to get down in 52.77 - just 0.6 seconds outside the previous track record - still clocked the fastest speed of 130kph.

"We've got to be more than happy with the way things have

gone so far," said the 30-year-old Para, seeking to become Britain's first Olympic medal winner since Tony Nash drove Robin Dixon to gold in Innsbruck 34 years ago. Since then Britain have not won an Olympic medal outside the ice rink.

At the last Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, when Olsson finished eighth, team-mate Mark Tait's fifth place was the

best British performance in the four man since Frederick McEvoy won the Bronze medal at Garmisch-Partenkirchen in 1936. "I'd have obviously settled for being in a medal place at the end of the first day, so it's tremendously pleasing to be right up there," said Olsson. "But we've still got it all to do over the final two runs."

"We won both our world cup bronze medals at Winterberg

and La Plagne this season in rainy conditions so hopefully that's a good omen."

Olsson held a 0.11-second advantage over third-placed Christian Reich of Switzerland, and was 0.16sec ahead of the previous track record holder, Brian Shimer of America who was in fourth place.

Under Olympic rules, a minimum two runs must take place for medals to be awarded. At Grenoble in 1968, Eugenio Monti won the Gold over two runs after officials cancelled the second day because of a thaw. The same had happened in St Moritz in 1928 while, four years later in Lake Placid, the four-man event was delayed until after the closing ceremony.

Having gone off first yesterday, Olsson put the Union Jack at the top of the Olympic leader board for the first time since Tait and Lenny Paul led the two man competition after the first two runs at Albertville in 1992.

However, they slipped back on the second day to finish sixth - which was the only reminder Olsson needed yesterday to take nothing for granted.

Results from the Winter Olympics

ALPINE SKIING	
Women's giant slalom	1 Deborah Compagnoni (It) 2min 50.59sec
1 Alexandra Meissnitzer (Aut) 2:52.59	2 Wendy Loob (Ger) 2:53.17
3 Katja Sedwiger (Ger) 2:53.21	4 Mari Holten (Nor) 2:53.27
5 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27	6 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27
7 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27	8 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27
9 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27	10 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27
11 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27	12 S. Lauerer (Austria) 2:53.27
CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING	
Women's 30km freestyle	1 Yulia Chepur (Rus) 1hr 22min 05.00sec
2 Stefania Belmondo (It) 1:22:17	3 Larissa Lazarenko (Rus) 1:22:17
4 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17	5 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17
6 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17	7 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17
8 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17	9 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17
10 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17	11 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17
12 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17	13 E. Nilsson (Nor) 1:22:17
WINTER OLYMPICS	
Women's 5000m final	1 Canada 6:59.65
2 Russia 6:59.65	3 Canada 6:59.65
4 Russia 6:59.65	5 Canada 6:59.65
6 Russia 6:59.65	7 Canada 6:59.65
8 Russia 6:59.65	9 Canada 6:59.65
10 Russia 6:59.65	11 Canada 6:59.65
12 Russia 6:59.65	13 Canada 6:59.65
FIGURE SKATING	
Women's final	1 Tara Lipinski (US) 2:25.55
2 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55	3 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55
4 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55	5 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55
6 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55	7 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55
8 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55	9 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55
10 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55	11 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55
12 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55	13 Michelle Kwan (US) 2:25.55

Protests, plain-clothes police and the happy music of mayhem



MIKE ROWBOTTOM
ON THE ODDBALL
WINTER GAMES

THE SYMBOLIC doves of peace had been released at the opening ceremony - inflatable doves in this case, bumping and rising into the grey sky like a stream of air bubbles.

Proclaiming themselves as the "Games from the Heart, Together with Love", the 18th Winter Olympics were officially underway.

Turning from the television, I pressed on with my work until I was distracted by what sounded like someone canvassing for an election. The voice, issuing from a loudspeaker, was that of a woman. And she was speaking in English.

"IOC go home. You are all assholes. You have shit for brains. You are all such bloody bastards..."

Staring down from my seventh-floor window at the busy road intersection below I saw a tall, white van, its sides covered in slogans, driving slowly along with its lights flashing.

"Go home Samaranch. You have shit for brains. Kiss my ass, Mr Prick. I really hate to speak to you."

The rhetoric continued, even though the van had been manoeuvred to a standstill by two white cars full of men who, I could only assume, were plain-clothes police. Grabbing my coat, I went out to take a closer look.

Whoever the protesters were they had made an impressive job of the slogans, which were Japanese on one side and English on the other.

"One Million of Trees were killed. \$20 billion of tax were gone. Dirty noble Samaranch. Burglar Tsutsumi. Sex King Clinton. The Sun Murdoch. Queen Elizabeth spoiled richest. Vatican. Monsanto. Coke. No Yakuza. No IOC. Go home. F--- you s-o-b. Sponsored by Cathay Pacific Airways."

If the Sex Pistols had ever released a second album, it would have done nicely for the cover.

These people were clearly not happy about many things. The van doors were covered with photocopies of a 1989 story in *The Sun* concerning right-wing Japanese protests against the Queen. *The Sun's* hugely amusing cartoon of the time, showing Prince Philip baring his

backside to the coffin of Emperor Hirohito, also featured. Returning to my room, I settled down to work once again. Presently, my labours were disturbed by a woman's voice. And she was speaking in English.

"Go home Samaranch. Gu home IOC. You are all assholes and sons of bitches..."

The van was heading slowly back into the centre of Nagano, accompanied by the two cars.

Why it was allowed to do so was beyond comprehension. Could it be that the police did not understand English sufficiently to realise what was being said? That seemed unbelievable.

A member of a Japanese television crew, who had also wit-

nessed the protest, told me it had been allowed to proceed on the basis of freedom of speech. That too seemed unbelievable. But then there are many things about these Games which have been hard to credit.

Witnessing the thunderous collision of national egos in the ice hockey match between Canada and the United States, I had difficulty reconciling the mayhem of general play with the music which punctuated it.

Canada's bear-with-a-sore-head captain, Eric Lindros, rips an opponent's headguard off with the ferocity of his challenge. But suddenly all the players are idly gliding and circling as Reginald Dismus-type organ music marks a break in the action.

Play resumes. The US player Gary Suter is slammed into the boards by a double body-check. Suddenly more organ music to the tune of "If you're happy and you know it" breaks the flow. And the audience clap.

The incongruity is fascinating. It's like playing "The Magic Roundabout" at a Mike Tyson fight.

And yet the organisers are clearly anxious to avoid the wrong kind of accompaniment. "Please refrain from making noise that may interfere with the game," we were warned by the announcer.

As curious, in a different way, are the scenes played out in the "kiss and cry" corner of the figure skating rink.

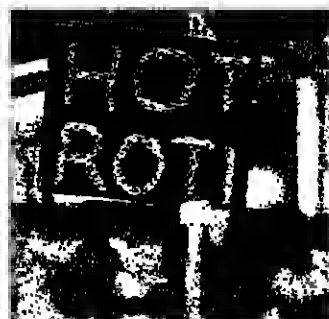
You have just fallen on your backside while attempting your first triple axel. You have subsequently bottled out of your triple loop and now you have returned to sit alongside your large, fur-coated coach and await the judges' marks.

The cameras zoom into your face. Your make-up is smudged with tears. As you look up and see the first set of marks - 4.1, 3.9, 4.1... - you are obliged to make small talk. Here come the second set of marks for artistic impression. 4.0, 4.1, 4.2...

How wonderful it would be to see a cornered under-achiever rise and give the nine judges a one-fingered salute. I don't know how these skaters put up with it. You wonder why they don't protest.

17/PHOTOSHOOT

هكذا من الأصل



PHOTOGRAPHS
BY
DAVID
ASHDOWN

Trinidad's exotic panorama of cricket classics

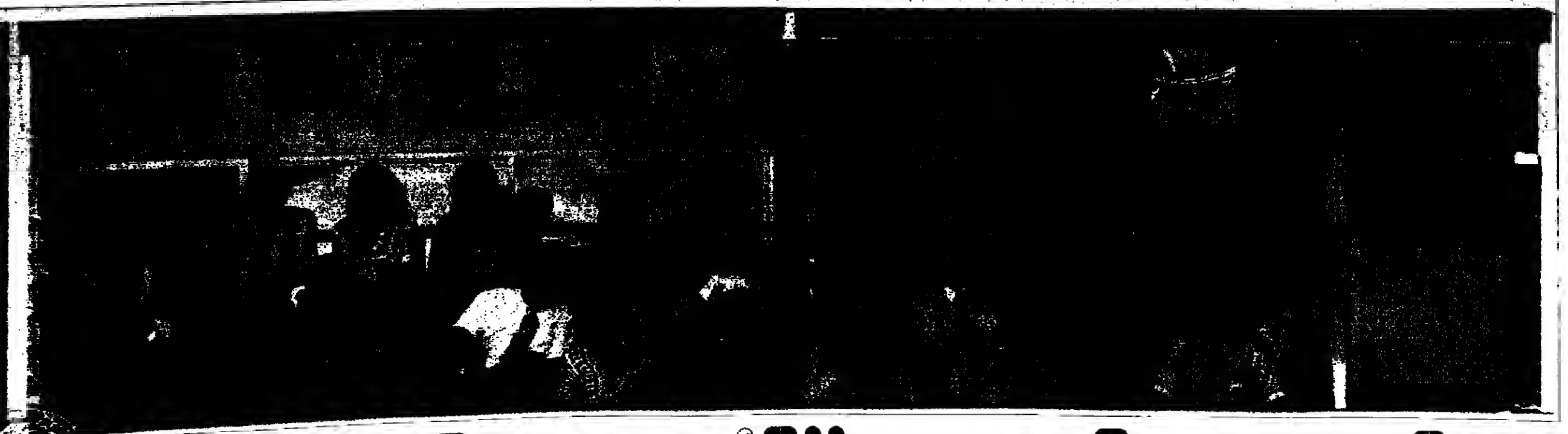
Over the last fortnight the picturesque panorama of the Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, Trinidad, has provided the backdrop to two of the most compelling Test matches of modern times, which more than made up for the fiasco in Kingston.

From the enthralled observers of the President's Box (bottom) to a ooisy crowd where the umbrella was the ultimate accoutrement - being useful against both sun and rain - the atmosphere was always good-humoured despite the tension of both games. Even the toss seemed to be fun and there could be no more appropriate antidote for the anxious appetite than hot roti - a fantastic farrago of fried meat or vegetables and potato wrapped in bread.

One of England's most memorable moments in the second Test was the dismissal of the West Indies captain, Brian Lara, caught by Michael Atherton (right) off Angus Fraser in the first innings. England's most successful bowler in the Caribbean now seems to be universally known as "the old warhorse" and his stock in trade, apart from accuracy, is a peculiar hand-dog expression which is best seen when runs are being scored off him (left).

When the dust settled, the series was level at 1-1, with all to play for as the Caribbean carnival moves on to Georgetown, Guyana, for the fourth Test, which starts on Friday 27 February.

● Copies of these photographs - and any others by the Independent and Independent on Sunday photographers David Ashdown, Peter Jay and Robert Hallam - can be ordered by telephoning 0171 293 2534.



Has the banker got a hero's heart?

Cheltenham is less than a month away and the Irish have their cash ready to pile on this year's certainty. Richard Edmondson reports

THERE are priests and prostitutes at the Cheltenham Festival, but the profession which most interests the visiting Irish is the banker, and that does not mean the plutocrats from the City.

The Irish banker is in fact a horse which appears at Cheltenham every 12 months. If it loses it is tremendous news for the bookmakers. It is wins it is tremendous news for just about everyone else, the thousands that back it and the service industries of Cotswolds restaurants, hotels and watering holes that meet their every need. The people who attend in addition to the priests probably do better business as well.

The burden of stimulating the Gloucestershire economy in under four weeks' time at National Hunt racing's fiesta will fall on a white-faced horse admirably built for carrying such a load. Florida Pearl looks as though he belongs in a circus, albeit not under a spangled acrobat but rather as part of the elephant troupe.

The six-year-old is a massive horse with a similar reputation and if his unbeaten record is arrested in the Royal Sun Alliance Novices' Chase the faces in the stands will be longer than a gasman's mackintosh.

Florida Pearl is trained in the Danu country of Co Carlow by Willie Mullins. Willie knows what it is like to win at the Festival as both jockey and trainer, and, most of all, he knows what it is like to be supervising a national treasure. He was assistant to his father Paddy during the incredible years of "The Mare". Dawn Run reached such celebrity that like "Himself" before her, she became recognised by the simplest of epithets.

Florida Pearl could not be more different from her in temperament. "Everyone that comes to the yard wants to see him and he's such a lovely laid-back horse that he smells and nuzzles them and everything," Mullins says. "Dawn Run was completely different. It was a job even to get in her box and even then you could do it only on her terms. Once you were in there she'd keep her eye on you all the time so you had to be careful."

Indeed, they still talk at Donninga of the day Dawn Run kicked a vet square in the chest as he was trying to administer an injection. Everyone who saw the medico travelling through

an expansive parabola felt sure he would land dead until the loop ended in a pile of straw. Florida Pearl has already proved he is good by handing out several thrashings. Now connections are hoping that, like Dawn Run, he will also show the great courage that only the finest possess. "You get plenty of horses who can show you speed and go past another, but not so many who can come back when another comes at them," Mullins says. "And then there's the very few who keep coming back two or three times against the very best horses. You need that heart that Dawn Run had. Defeat wasn't in her vocabulary and I'm just hoping he's going to be the same."

Willie Mullins was riding no Irish tracks while still under the tutelage of Cistercian monks at boarding school. His first contact with Cheltenham glory came when Hazy Dawn won the National Hunt Chase in 1982. Roly Daniels, the country singer and mare's owner, celebrated by warbling through Danny Boy in the unsaddling enclosure.

That day, a St Patrick's Day, is said to be the only occasion that Paddy Mullins, Hazy Dawn's trainer, has ever shown emotion at the racecourse. It was the first time one of his offspring had partnered a Festival winner.

Two years later, and the day after Dawn Run had won the Champion Hurdle, Willie Mullins won the National Hunt Chase again with Macks Friendly. It was an afternoon when the jockey wondered if he had overdone the partying the night before.

Indian Arrow and Ottawa ready for the long haul

By John Cobb

THE mysteries of race-planning dictate that today's two most valuable races are both Grand National rehearsals. Chepstow's version, the John Hughes Grand National Trial, promises to be the most informative with the Aintree entrants River Mandate, St Mellion Fairway and Destin D'Estraval among the runners, while at Newcastle Scotton Banks, Samlee and Linden's Lottos are worthy of consideration for the National itself.

Typically, though, what wins today may have little bearing on the result on 4 April. The novice Ottawa (2.15), deemed too immature for Aintree, can take



Bite but no malice: The friendly Florida Pearl after his latest win with Willie Mullins (right)

Photograph: Caroline Norris

fore. As he swung into the straight on Macks Friendly he could not see the final fence and initially believed he had strayed on to the hurdles course. Only when the last obstacle appeared out of the shadow of the stands did the self-admission slip.

The six-times amateur champion is perhaps most famous for the two distinct orbits he used to take around the racecourse, either a Mercury or a Pluto but nothing in between. In winning the 1983 Foxhunter at Liverpool on Altha Clithair he plotted a course so tight that his

boots were scoured with paint on his return. Yet in soft ground in particular, a favoured Mullins tactic was to go right round the outside in search of better going. Sometimes it worked, but other times they had to go out looking for him with torches.

However, by the time he had partnered Wither Or Which to success in the Festival humber two years ago the infatuation was disappearing. "I was getting off horses still concentrating on the race and not able to communicate properly with the owners," Mullins says. "By the

time I wasn't enjoying it. People told me that when I stopped riding I would miss it desperately. I haven't."

Now, aged 41, Mullins is happily established at Clonsilla, close to his father's yard. About 200 yards from the stables is a reminder of where most dreams end, the village graveyard.

The trainer tells you he is not a natural worrier, but it is not a message that nature itself forwards. The top of Mullins's head reveals that the good Lord has taken some of his hair away to save for later.

There have been stories emanating from Ireland that Mullins already considers Florida Pearl to be as good as Dawn Run and the only remaining question is whether he will transpire to be the equal of Arkle. This, however, was not the tone of our conversation.

Indeed, Willie Mullins is a worried man when he considers how fortunate he has been with the boy's health. Bacteria does not stay away for ever, and not all the stones are kicked off the gallops each morning.

In addition, there is the concern that a beast which showed as much flashing acceleration as Florida Pearl did in last year's Cheltenham humber may not have the stamina for National Hunt's most prized assignment. "He stayed a trip in a point-to-point but obviously it's different against top-class horses," Mullins says. "We're just hoping he runs well this year and earns a Gold Cup entry next year."

"When people buy a horse, no matter what it costs, they always dream it's going to be a Festival horse. About 99 times out of a hundred they're disappointed so at least we're somewhere with this one."

"I know people are looking at him now, and I have to keep telling myself that he's just a horse." But Florida Pearl is much, much more. He's not just a horse. He's the banker.

Chepstow's trial and prove that, despite being fortunate to win at Uttoxeter last time when Kamikaze's pilot ejected and left the race to Paul Nicholls's charge, he is a considerable force in his own right.

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Muskhill
(Chepstow 1.15)
NB: Lake Kariba
(Warwick 3.40)

Newcastle's trial, the Elder Chase, may fall to Indian Arrow (3.05), a horse who had been campaigned almost exclusively over two miles until a couple of months ago. When he was tried over a distance of ground at

Wincanton last time he proved a revelation and, although he may be too far out of the handicap to make an impact at Aintree, he should be able to cope with another horse stepping up in trip here, Linden's Lottos.

Chepstow's opener may go to Muskhill (1.15), who was bred by Pat Eddery and was put through his paces by the former champion Flat jockey this week. His trainer, David Nicholson, runs two in this event and may also be on the mark in the novice hurdle at Warwick with Samuel Wilderspin (4.10).

A trial for Cheltenham's Arkle Chase is the main attraction at Warwick and Lake Kariba (3.40), who fell in the early

stages of a race at Ascot last time, may just outpoint Ashwell Boy. There are more top novices on show at Chepstow, where Fiddling The Facts (3.45) can outjump Escartefigue.

Nick Henderson has advised bookmakers to remove Sharpie from Champion Hurdle betting because the horse has a leg problem. Sharpie, as low as 14-1 for Cheltenham, took a knock during his impressive win in the Tote Gold Trophy last week. "It's responding," Henderson said. "But we are never going to take chances with this horse and it's unlikely he'll run. I'm not ruling him out completely but for betting purposes he has to come out."

Lingfield

HYPERION
1.50 Ki Chi Saga 2.20 Aquaviva 2.55 Without Friends 3.25 Witherfinder 3.55 Tangerine Flyer 4.25 Call The Boss 4.55 Italian Symphony

GOING: Slow. STALLS: Inside, except 5f & 7m (outside).
DRAW ADVANTAGE: Low for 5f & 7m.
Left-hand, sharp course (European surface).
Course 5f & 7m on 1000m. Station advice course. ADMISS: 50p. Club & Family Enclosure 10p. CAR PARK: 50p. Rest: free.
LEADING TRAINERS: G. L. Moore 75-60 (53%), R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%), Lord Hamilton 40-25 (62%), J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
LEADING JOCKEYS: A. Clark 70-54 (52%), S. Whitworth 21-34 (63%), H. Holland 40-27 (67%), J. Quinn 35-22 (53%).
FAVOURITES: 70-22 (53%).
BLINKERED FIRST TIME: River Mandate, Sandcastle (50p), Forgiven Times (50p), Call The Boss (42p).

1.50 MERLIN SELLING HANDICAP (CLASS F) (DIV 1) £2,000 added 1m

1. 0001 KI CHI SAGA (7) (C) G. L. Moore 9.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 FANCY DANCER (8) (C) G. L. Moore 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 ANEMAN (7) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 TYROLIAN DANCER (22) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 CROCH PATRICK (17) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 SPENCER STALLONE (20) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 SANDCASTLE (50p) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

Windsor

HYPERION
2.25 Polar Lord 3.00 John Drumm 3.30 Shaddan 4.00 Symbol Of Success 4.30 Trail Boss 5.00 No Pattern

GOING: Good to Firm (Firm in places).
Figures of weight, level, with sharp turns, and long straight.
Course 5f & 7m on 1000m. Station advice course. ADMISS: 50p. Club & Family Enclosure 10p. CAR PARK: 50p. Rest: free.
LEADING TRAINERS: G. L. Moore 75-60 (53%), R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%), Lord Hamilton 40-25 (62%), J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
LEADING JOCKEYS: A. Clark 70-54 (52%), S. Whitworth 21-34 (63%), H. Holland 40-27 (67%), J. Quinn 35-22 (53%).
FAVOURITES: 70-22 (53%).
BLINKERED FIRST TIME: None.

2.25 KING JOHN NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS D) £3,750 added 2m 110yds

1. 7250 NORTON FLITTER (21) (C) D. Egan 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 7251 CHORON (17) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
3. 7252 BE MY BOY (20) (C) D. Egan 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 7253 MOONLIGHT AIR (23) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 7254 BROWNOUT (18) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 7255 FOUNTAIN VILLAGE (12) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 7256 DENVER (10) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
8. 7257 POLAR LORD (25) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
9. 7258 MISTY CLASS (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
10. 7259 ROSCORRE (11) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
11. 7260 SPENCER STALLONE (20) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
12. 7261 GRENDA (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
13. 7262 LUCIFER (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

3.00 MAGNA CARTA NOVICE CHASE (CLASS E) £4,000 added 2m 5f

1. 4241 JOHN DRUM (7) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 4242 JOHN DRUM (7) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 4243 STARDUST (17) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
4. 4244 SPENCER STALLONE (20) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 4245 STARDUST (17) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
6. 4246 TROUVILLE (17) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).

2.20 OSPREY HANDICAP (CLASS D) £5,000 added 2m

1. 0011 CHANADA TIGER (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0012 SHERIFF (11) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
3. 0013 TIME CAN TELL (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0014 COLLIERIE (21) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0015 PALMIST (21) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0016 AQUAVIVA (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

2.55 MERLIN SELLING HANDICAP (CLASS F) (DIV 1) £2,000 added 1m

1. 0001 KI CHI SAGA (7) (C) G. L. Moore 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 FANCY DANCER (8) (C) G. L. Moore 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 ANEMAN (7) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 TYROLIAN DANCER (22) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 CROCH PATRICK (17) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 SPENCER STALLONE (20) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 SANDCASTLE (50p) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

3.30 HATCH BRIDGE NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS D) £10,000 added 4YO 2m

1. 0001 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

4.00 DAVID ZEPPAN 40TH BIRTHDAY HCAP CHASE (CLASS D) £5,000 3m

1. 1001 RIBBON OF SUCCESS (24) (C) D. Egan 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 1002 JARVIS BOY (19) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

4.30 STAINES HANDICAP CHASE (CLASS E) £4,000 added 2m 5f

1. 3241 TRAIL BOSS (21) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 3242 MAN MOON (18) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 3243 COURT MASTER (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 3244 CARLINGFORD (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 3245 ANOTHER COURSE (7) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 3246 AT IT AGAIN (20) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

5.00 RUNNYMEDE HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS D) £3,750 added 2m

1. 1001 DAVESOLD (10) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 1002 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 1003 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 1004 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 1005 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 1006 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

3.25 FAUCETS SPEEDY CLASSIC HANDICAP (CLASS C) £7,750 added 6f

1. 0001 APOLLO (20) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 SPEEDY CLASSIC (19) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 WITHEROR WHICH (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 SHALTYSTAR (24) (C) G. L. Moore 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 RORO MUSIC (16) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).
6. 0006 SCORPION RIDGE (14) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 JUST LOUI (17) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
8. 0008 FORTUNE TELLER (18) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
9. 0009 KRYSTAL MAX (23) (C) D. Egan 9.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
10. 0010 HEAVENLY ABSTINE (7) (C) P. Egan 37.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

3.55 BUZZARD HANDICAP (CLASS D) £5,000 added 3YO 5f

1. 0001 VISTA ALBERT (17) (C) P. Egan 37.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 TANGERS FLYER (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 WINDMILL (18) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 RED PEPPER (11) (C) P. Egan 37.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 MISS BANANAS (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

7.00 DUCK MAIDEN STAKES (CLASS D) £4,000 added 3YO 6f

1. 0001 BRANCO BLUE (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 CROCH PATRICK (17) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 SHADY (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 FLORISS (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 HEVER GOLF PASSION (17) (C) J. Berry 32-34 (50%).

7.30 COW CLAIMING LIMITED STAKES (CLASS F) £3,000 added 1m 100yds

1. 0001 ZORRA (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 PAULET TO HIT (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 CROCH PATRICK (17) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 EASTLIGH (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 NORTHERN JUDGE (11) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 SHERATON GIRL (1) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
8. 0008 MISS BOTE (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
9. 0009 MYSTERY MAN (20) (C) P. Egan 37.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
10. 0010 TECHNICIAN (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

7.30 COW CLAIMING LIMITED STAKES (CLASS F) £3,000 added 1m 100yds

1. 0001 ZORRA (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 PAULET TO HIT (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 CROCH PATRICK (17) (C) R. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 HATCH BRIDGE (14) (C) M. Lottos 4.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 EASTLIGH (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 NORTHERN JUDGE (11) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 SHERATON GIRL (1) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
8. 0008 MISS BOTE (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
9. 0009 MYSTERY MAN (20) (C) P. Egan 37.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
10. 0010 TECHNICIAN (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

4.25 BARN OWL MAIDEN STAKES (CLASS D) £5,000 added 1m

1. 0001 GRAND OVIATION (22) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 HANIKATO (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 SEVERITY (21) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 CALL THE BOSS (14) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 MISTY TRICK (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 CAPTIVATING (18) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

4.55 HARRIER LIMITED STAKES (CLASS F) £3,000 added 7f

1. 0001 ITALIAN SYMPHONY (7) (C) P. Egan 37.0.0.0. S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 ROSEBUD (11) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 BLUE FLUTER (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 CASTLE ABBEY JACK (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 THEATRE MAGIC (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 PRINCE OF THE PAST (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 PAUL BLANCO (11) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
8. 0008 SERGEANT MARY (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
9. 0009 SCOTLAND LADY (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

8.00 LABROCK FREEPHONE HANDICAP (CLASS D) £5,000 added 1m 100yds

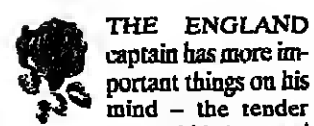
1. 0001 GULF SHAKES (12) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 BULLAZICH (17) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 BOWLING (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 YEMMAN OLIVER (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 DENHAME (10) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

8.30 SHEEP HANDICAP (CLASS F) £3,000 added 2m 48yds

1. 0001 ALDENHEIM (14) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
2. 0002 PROSPECTOR GIVE (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
3. 0003 BLUE FLUTER (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
4. 0004 ROSEBUD (11) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
5. 0005 HEAD GARDENER (14) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
6. 0006 JACOBSON OF CORNWALL (2) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
7. 0007 PAUL BLANCO (11) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
8. 0008 SERGEANT MARY (7) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).
9. 0009 SCOTLAND LADY (20) (C) S. Whitworth 7.0.0.0. F. Hamilton 46-35 (53%).

9.00 GOOSE SELLING STAKES (

Mixer fighting off loneliness of leadership



THE ENGLAND captain has more important things on his mind - the tender state of his battered rib-cage, for starters - but he soldiers on like a seasoned showbiz troupier, razzing and dazzling his way through a 15-minute press conference and a dozen separate television and radio interviews.

He presses the flesh and delivers his soundbites with customary poise but to the acute observer, he is microscopically moodier than usual. Everybody wants a piece of Lawrence Dallaglio these days and just occasionally, he wishes they would find someone else's bones to pick.

Twenty-four hours later, he is back on Planet Positive. He has survived what he describes as a "fiery little contact session" under the unforgiving gaze of John Mitchell, the assistant England coach. His ribs have been tested to the limit and passed muster. "No reaction at all," he says. "And if there was ever a session that would have caused a reaction, that was it. Ever since we lost in Paris, John has been telling us how soft we are. I think we're a bit harder now."

Like most rugby types, Dallaglio far prefers playing a good game to talking one; ask him whether he would rather answer seven questions about today's England-Wales match at Twickenham or have seven bells knocked out of him in training and he would take rather less than a nano-second to give you his reply. "I enjoy playing ball on a Saturday afternoon," he says. "It's that simple. Don't even ask me how I felt, sitting around on the sidelines watching Wasps lose at Bath last week. I do not like missing matches, period."

But life is not that simple for an England captain, as Dallaglio readily accepts. It is a solitary role, a one-man epic played out in the full view of the mob and while the latest star turn shows no sign of falling prey to the demonic insecurities that so exhausted his immediate predecessors - Will Carling, the Hamlet miscast as hero, and Phil de Glanville, the natural leader betrayed by a catastrophic dip in form - he is fully

In his brief career as the England captain, Lawrence Dallaglio has yet to lead his side to victory. But, as he told Chris Hewett, he remains a firm believer in long-termism

aware of the minefield he now treads.

"I wouldn't say the job has made me feel lonely or isolated in any way, but I can quite see how the captaincy might have that effect on someone who fails to guard against it," he says. "Fortunately, I'm not the kind of person who allows himself to become detached or disconnected. High-profile positions tend to have, their lonely moments but I like to think I'm a mixer, someone who gets on with pretty well everyone both on and off the field."

"Captaincy is great, a dream job, when things are going well. But there's a flipside to everything and the flipside to captaincy is that things blow up in your face now and again. The acid test is how much you're prepared to learn from the knock-backs, how adept you are at picking up the pieces and building something stronger than you had before."

"Long before I was ever made captain of anything, I decided that the only way forward in this game was to perform for the team first and myself second. You are so dependent on other people in rugby that when you get to international level, it is almost like going to war. Like any group of soldiers, the members of a team need absolute trust in each other. It's a 'You look after them and they'll look after you' thing. Once that trust is breached, everything falls apart."

"That's why you won't hear me or, indeed, anyone else in this team being critical of a colleague in public. I want to develop a culture of collective responsibility, firstly because rugby is a team game and it's pretty daft to stomp around blaming individuals for what ever goes wrong over the course of 80 minutes and, secondly, because in my book, you rally round when you see someone in difficulty. What you don't do is wait until after the game and talk behind his back."

Dallaglio's "core values" - the

camaraderie, the musketeerish "all for one, one for all" ethic - will be under all sorts of strain if Wales, bolshie and buoyant under the bright new stewardship of Rob Howley, manage to sack Twickenham for the first time in a decade this afternoon.

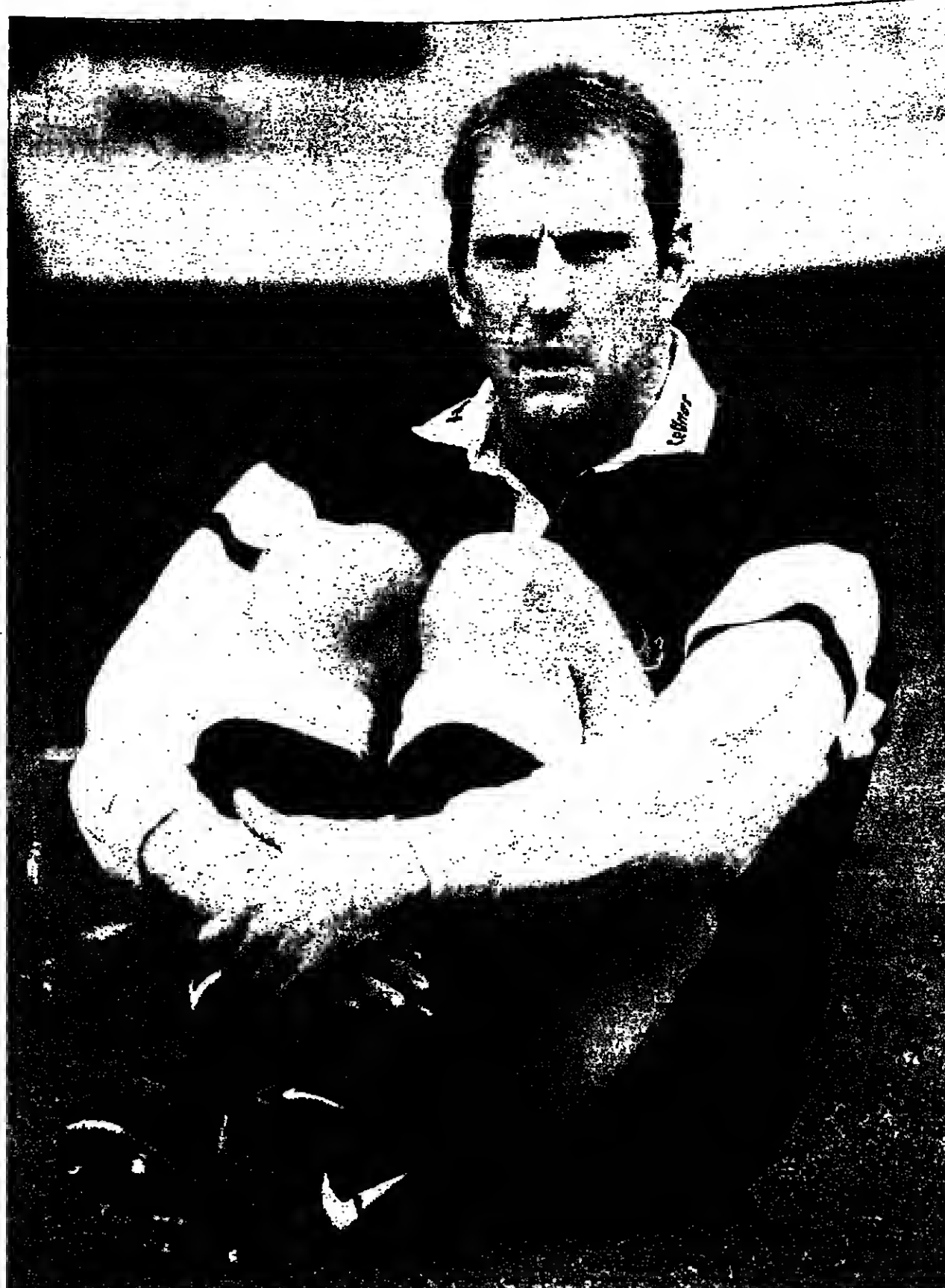
It is not something Dallaglio expects to happen, not by a very long chalk, but he is at pains to emphasise that the building of Clive Woodward's New England is likely to take months, maybe even a year or two, rather than weeks.

"I can quite understand people - the supporters, especially, but also some of the players in this squad - who want things to happen quickly. Christ knows, I'm like it myself. I want to be the best, I want to beat everyone every day of the week and when things don't work out, I'm the first to give it the 'Why, why, why?' routine. I'm not the most naturally patient person in the world, to be honest."

"But this is a serious business we're involved in here and it just doesn't come to you overnight. You do your level best, you take stock, you tweak and twist things here and there and you go again. Above all, you listen to advice. The ability to listen is the greatest attribute you can have as an ambitious sportsman."

"When you're England captain, of course, everyone under the sun has a piece of advice for you and I understand that. You can turn a deaf ear, of course, and be dismissive to people. But the art of it is to digest what is being said, pick out the nuggets and throw the rest overboard. No-one knows it all in this game: not me, not the coaches, not even the bloody All Blacks, although they probably know more than most. Once you stop listening, you may as well go and do something else."

Not only does Dallaglio listen, both to Woodward and his coaching team and carefully selected advisers outside the narrow confines of the national squad, but he studies as well. He investigates the dynamics of



A good ear: The ability to listen is the greatest attribute you can have as an ambitious sportsman, Lawrence Dallaglio said this week, as he prepared for today's game against Wales

sporting excellence in whatever manifestation he happens to find it and every time he discovers a "little gem of information", he works out a way of modifying it for his own purposes.

"What fascinates me is the secret of maintaining peak performance over a long period of time and it seems to me that the key to consistent success lies internally rather than externally. The best put pressure on themselves; they set their own standards and they keep at it, night and day, until they meet them. And then what do they do? They set new standards. It never ends, no matter what they may achieve."

"In rugby, I don't look much

further than New Zealand as a model outfit. But I'm also intrigued by the Chicago Bulls, the Williams Formula One team, some of the yachtsmen who prove themselves time and again in incredibly difficult circumstances. What these people have in common is a drive from within. They're implacable in their pursuit of excellence and that's how I want to see this England team develop."

"We've got the talent in this country and we're pretty well looked after in terms of resources but there are certain differences, tiny but absolutely crucial, between ourselves and the real high-achievers. That is why the 26-all draw with the All Blacks before Christmas was of

more use to us than a win, which would have given us a false impression of where we were at."

"It didn't take me very long in Paris a fortnight ago to realise we were going to have a bad day. It was fairly clear, right from the outset, that something was wrong in our collective psychology. Do the All Blacks ever feel that? And if they do, how do they go about dealing with it in such a way as to win a game they really ought to lose? That's what we have to discover and it will take a while to get there."

"Fortunately, it seems we've managed to instil a sense of long-termism in the squad. The players know that losing in

Paris did not automatically make them a poor side, any more than drawing with the Blacks made them a great one. We lost sight of a few basics against France and we happened to catch them on one of their good days. Against Wales, we'll take it right back down to winning our one-on-ones, our individual battles, and build from there."

Win or lose, you suspect that Dallaglio will thrive in his one-on-one today. His ribs may well give him all manner of jip and the Henry Cooper-ish scar issue over his right eye may well split asunder once again. But England's captain does not give a fig about being bloodied, provided he remains unbowed.

Travails of Winter now in the past

Boxing

MARK WINTERS faces a battle of the mind in the first defence of his British light welterweight title against the Londoner, Bernard Paul, in the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, tonight.

The Ulsterman returns to the ring following the unhappy circumstances surrounding his title victory in October at the Sheffield Arena when his opponent, Carl Wright, subsequently fell into a coma, requiring neuro surgery to remove a blood clot.

Wright has made a remarkable recovery following his fight for life and is backing the champion's quest to make the Lonsdale belt his own.

The unbeaten Winters, a part-time travel agent in Antrim, spent time with the Liverpoolian and his family leading up to his first defence.

"I spent a week in Liverpool sparring with the WBU [World Boxing Union] champion Shea Neary and Andy Holligan and spent a lot of time with Carl," Winters said. "He has told me to go on and win the Lonsdale belt and I am dedicating this fight to him."

"It was the greatest moment of my career so far to win the British title and the next day it was the worst moment when I heard about Carl."

"I considered quitting the ring and my career was on hold until I knew that Carl had recovered. Everybody asks me how I will react once I get in the ring and I simply won't know until I get in there."

One thing the 26-year-old is certain about is victory over Paul, although the former Commonwealth champion has predicted that he will knock him out "in the later rounds."

Winters retorted: "There is no chance that I will lose my title to Bernard. He says he is a hard puncher but I've been sparring with Shea Neary and Bernard doesn't hit harder than him."

Paul, from Tottenham, is arguably having his last attempt at lifting a major title at the age of 32, having lost the Commonwealth belt to Paul Burke in August. That followed a controversial points win at Bethnal Green in April over Felix Bwalya, who subsequently died three days after defeating Burke at the end of last year.

The Commonwealth title is now vacant and Burke has been nominated to fight for the belt, with Ghana's Judas Clottey expected to be the opponent.

Paul would like a re-match with Burke but has focused on toppling Winters, who will be making his first appearance at home following 12 straight wins. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth cruiserweight champion, Darren Corbett, faces the Belgian Dirk Wallyn in a 10-round non-title fight. Wallyn was last seen in a British ring losing in 90 seconds to the former European champion Johnny Nelson and Corbett is expected to deliver a similar result before his world title bout with the World Boxing Organisation champion, Carl Thompson.

"I can't take any chances because my title fight with Thompson would be gone if I lost," said Corbett. "The fight with Thompson is expected to happen on 18 or 25 April."

The unbeaten Briton heavyweight Danny Williams should chalk up his 13th straight victory inside the distance when he faces Tim Ray from Kentucky.

Lee speeds in to last four

Snooker

Stephen Lee made it a television debut to forget for the surprise Regal Scottish Open quarter-finalist, Chris Scanlon, in Aberdeen yesterday.

Lee, the world No 16, raced to a 5-0 whitewash of his London rival in just 84 minutes to reach his second major semi-final of the season.

The unheralded Scanlon had won his previous two games by the same margin but, as Lee admitted: "I don't think I would have beaten Chris by that score if I'd been playing on one of the outside tables."

"Chris couldn't really settle down, probably because it was his first time before the cameras."

Lee now meets the Scotsman Marcus Campbell or Scanlon's practice partner, Ronnie O'Sullivan, in the semi-finals today.

Scots hope for another home upset

By Simon Turnbull

IT SHOULD perhaps only be whispered in the mill towns of the Scottish Borders, but the winning team at Murrayfield this afternoon will be halfway to a Grand Slam. If Scotland happen to emerge victorious even those unfortunates who bought sweaters commemorating the 1996 Scottish Slam that never was, before Dean Richards gave Rob Wainwright's men a mauling at Murrayfield, might be moved to actually don their premature purchases tonight.

The metaphorical counting of chickens is one thing, though. Accounting for the French cockerel promises to be quite another matter.

France have won five successive matches in the Five Nations' Championship since the 16-15 defeat in Cardiff that handed the 1996 title to England. Scotland will have to un-batch one of the all-time upsets to stop Les Tricolores stretching their winning run to six.

The form book has been famously torn up for this fixture

before. The French have a habit of freezing on Scottish soil. Only once since 1978 have they won at Murrayfield.

That was four years ago, when Jean-Luc Sadoury scored the opening try in a 20-12 success. Of the French XV who line up today, only he and Olivier Brouzet have savoured victory over the Scots in Scotland. It is a psychological crumb upon which the Scottish camp are hoping to feast. "I would like to think there is still a Murrayfield factor," Jim Telfer, Scotland's coach, said.

This factor did not, however, spare the Scots from ritual slaughters in their two pre-Christmas home internationals. Australia and South Africa inflicted record defeats, 37-8 and 68-10 respectively.

France ought to bury their Edinburgh bogey under a similar barrage of points this afternoon. It is, after all, just 11 months since the 47-20 Paris mis-match that left them celebrating their first Grand Chelem clinched on home ground while the Scots went homeward tae

think again with a record Five Nations' defeat.

France showed in their 24-17 win against England a fortnight ago that their own trampling by the Springboks has not done any permanent damage to the combination of forward power and attacking pace that Jean-Claude Skrela and Pierre Villepreux have hinged into their ranks. Scotland's victory in Dublin was an altogether more prosaic affair.

The class gap between the nations is perhaps further emphasised by the extent of attacking faith the Scottish selectors have invested in Derrick Lee. "Derrick is an exciting young prospect who gives us attacking options," Telfer said. "He played well against Ireland."

The London Scottish full-back, however, only played the final five minutes in Dublin. That is the extent of international experience he will bring to bear in direct opposition to Sadoury, who won the first of his 61 caps as a replacement for Serge Blanco in Cardiff seven years ago.

SCOTLAND v FRANCE

at Murrayfield				
D Lee	London Scottish	15	J-L Sadoury	Colonniers
A Stanger	Hawick	14	P Bernat-Salles	Paul
A Tait	Newcastle	13	C Lamaison	Brive
G Townsend	Northampton	12	S Glas	Bourgoin
K Logan	Widnes	11	C Domini	Stade Francais
C Chalmers	Melrose	10	T Castaignède	Castres
G Armstrong	Newcastle, capt	9	P Carboneau	Brive
D Hilton	Bath	8	C Califano	Toulouse
G Bulloch	West of Scotland	7	R Ibanez	Dax, capt
M Stewart	Northampton	6	F Tournaire	Toulouse
D Cronin	Widnes	5	F Pelous	Toulouse
D Weir	Newcastle	4	O Brouzet	Bègles-Bordeaux
R Wainwright	Dundee HFP	3	M Liévrémont	Stade Francais
S Holmes	London Scottish	2	O Magne	Brive
P Walton	Newcastle	1	T Liévrémont	Perpignan
Substitutes: M R Shepherd (Melrose), 17 S Longstaff (Dundee HFP), 18 A Wood (Bath), 19 S Grimes (Widnes), 20 A Rutherford (Kelso), 21 G Graham (Newcastle), 22 G Ellis (Currie).				
Referee: P O'Brien (New Zealand)		Kick-off: 3.0 (BBC1)		

Scotland's task might not be so daunting if the cutting edge of Sadoury was the extent of their worries. From one to 15, though, the French have the sharpness to slice through.

Alan Tait stands to make history as the first Scottish player since Johnny Wallace in 1925 to

score tries in four successive Five Nations games. The trouble is the Newcastle Falcon will probably have his claws full fighting a rearguard battle.

It is likely to be a losing battle, too. But, then, Scotland would still be a third of the way to a Triple Crown.

McRae's relative success is the spur for elusive British driver's championship

Rallying

ALISTER MCRAE is determined to emulate his two famous rallying relatives by winning his second Mobil British Championship this year.

The 27-year-old from Larnock knows that to uphold family pride, he must add to his 1995 triumph in the British series. McRae's father Jimmy captured the title on five occasions

between 1981 and 1988, and still competes successfully in the championship's category for historic cars. And Alister's brother Colin took the crown in 1991 and 1992 before going on to become one of the world's leading rally drivers.

Alister had an excellent chance to claim a second championship last year when he headed the standings going into the final round on the Isle of Man. But just when he looked

set for glory, the Scot crashed his Volkswagen Golf and left the way clear for Mark Higgins to prise the title from his grasp.

The heartbreak of 1997 still haunts McRae but it has made him more determined to make amends this year. "I was disappointed to miss out on the championship last year and it's certainly something I'm hoping to put right this time," he said. "I'd like to win the title again to equal Colin's record, although

I'm not sure about winning it five times like my father did."

McRae has plenty of faith in his Volkswagen team, who won the manufacturer's championship last year despite their No1 driver's mishap in the Maxis event.

"I'm very confident about the coming season," said McRae. "We know our car will be very competitive on the gravel event early in the season and will have a new model,

which will be a major step forward on the tarmac round later on."

McRae will be in action today when he opens Volkswagen's bid to retain the manufacturer's championship in the season's curtain-raiser, the Silverstone rally sprint.

His own personal pursuit of glory will begin in the first round of the driver's series, the Vauxhall Rally of Wales, next month.

Running rugby at its most Austintatious.

(Healey scores first try, £20 pays £260*)

ENGLAND v WALES		
Twickenham. Kick off 3.00 pm. Live on Sky.		
1/7 ENGLAND	4/1 WALES	22/1 DRAW
First Tryscorer		
12/1 K. Bracken	13/2 England win by 1-5 points	
12/1 A. Healey	6/1 England win by 6-10 points	
14/1 J. Guscott	4/1 England win by 11-15 points	
14/1 R. Howley	5/1 England win by 16-20 points	
14/1 M. Pardy	8/1 England win by 21-25 points	
16/1 N. Back	7/1 Wales win by 1-5 points	
16/1 A. Badgerman	18/1 Wales win by 6-10 points	
16/1 S. Gibbs	22/1 Wales win by 11-15 points	
20/1 S. O'Brien		

SCOTLAND v FRANCE		
Murrayfield. Kick off 3.00 pm. Live on BBC.		
4/1 SCOTLAND	17/1 FRANCE	22/1 DRAW
First Tryscorer		
10/1 C. Lamaison	7/1 Scotland win by 1-5 points	
12/1 P. Carboneau	10/1 Scotland win by 6-10 points	
16/1 G. Armstrong	13/2 France win by 1-5 points	
16/1 T. Castaignède	5/1 France win by 6-10 points	
20/1 G. Townsend	4/1 France win by 11-15 points	
26/1 R. Wainwright	5/1 France win by 16-20 points	

*When playing on regular reality sites do not count for first try.
*Whichever shown inside the £20 you bet with deduction paid.
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SPORT
ON TV

My first idea was to run the skating and the ice hockey

Or the style-free Frenchman, Philippe Candeloro, who cut easily the most ridiculous figure in Nagano in his red and black jumpsuit, clearly the result

Or you could have a special bossbitch course that dipped in the middle and put the two worst crews from the first run against each other, starting at opposite ends and providing fun and laughter for all the family when they meet in the middle. Or better still, strap drug cheats (or Naseem Hamed) to a huge and run them off against the four-man hit squad (I admit here to the influence of the greatest comedian who ever lived, Bill Hicks, who advocated letting age relatives go out with a bang as extras in Stephen Seagal movies: "Go on, grandma, walk

With last week's harsh words in mind, I settled down to watch skating this week equipped with a vat of pen-poison. A short while later, I found myself doing the hitherto unthinkable - rewinding to watch Michelle

The young American went to the Games riding a hype-wave hand-in-hand with her rival, Lipitski. It is unfair on them both, but I can't help associating them in my mind with Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding from four years ago, though I can't imagine Lipitski involved in anything more violent than threatening and threatening till she's thick. She is technically perfect, but a little soulless, while Kwan has the artistry: one manoeuvre, a spiral, in which she inscribed a line across the rink that had the finesse of a line drawing by Picasso, Matisse or Coteau, was a lump-in-the-throat job. Honest. So I take it all back. Well, most of it. After

It seems these days that you cannot go more than a couple of months without another sports magazine programme leaping on to the screens. The BBC's *Onside* was the most recent, and Carlton's imaginatively-titled *The Sports Show* is presumably intended as a response.

If so, it needn't bother itself, eschewing as it does the sports-like, Cosy Corner approach of John Inverdale and his team. ITV have the Pudgy Twins, Eamonn Holmes and Will Carling,

The programme did, though, produce the line of the week, on the subject of the 40 per cent ticket-price hike at Chelsea. "I'm going to have my wages paid directly into the club," one fan said. "It's the only way to get a season ticket these days."

Derek Pringle
reports from Georgetown

Depending on the pitch expected at the Bourda, where the fourth Test starts on Friday, the places most under pressure are at No 3 and 6 in the batting order, though a second spinner may also be an option.

"You could look at this as your big chance," said Ramp-rakash, who scored a century in

Mark Ramprakash is finally heading for his first game of the tour against Guyana today

Photograph: Ross Setford/Empic

Myles Hodgson
reports from Matara

England A 186; Sri Lanka A 190-7
Sri Lanka A win by three wickets

Needing victory to draw level in the three-match series after their 142-run defeat in Moratuwa on Wednesday, England made a determined attempt to defend a disappointing total of 186 but were unable to prevent Sri Lanka succeeding in the penultimate over.

However, despite their fail-

England had suffered an equally disastrous start after being put into bat by losing Knight, Andrew Flintoff, Hollis-oake and Darren Maddy inside the opening 21 overs.

Kelpogone 83-0-34-0.	
SPI LANKA A	
A Gunewardene b Hoffoos	1
A J Hethunathighe c Knight b Brown	1
R P Arnold not out	81
D R M Jayawardene c Read b Brown	1
D R M Jayawardene b Hoffoos	1
*R R Kelpogone at Read b Maddy	1
*U R U Chaminda Row b Maddy	1
R Paliyaguru c Coover b Maddy	1
R S Dassanayake not out	31
Extras (for 48.55 runs)	
Total (for 7 wickets)	140
Kelpogone 83-0-32-4-140	
Did not bat: N Bandula; H Boteju.	
Bowling: Hoffoos 10-0-30-2; Brown 10-1-30-2;	
Eatham 9-0-31-0; Giles 9.5-0-48-0; Coover	
4-0-22-0; R Sidi 4-0-16-3.	

Sailing

Silk Cut had been sailing under jury rig for 10 days following the loss of the top section of her mast. "We hope to be in port less than 12 hours," Smith said. "We are still racing."

Brunei Sunergy duly moved into second place after their audacious decision to sail around the eastern coast of the Falkland Islands. While Innovation Kvaerner, Merit Cup, Swedish Match and Toshiba have been becalmed to the west for two days.

WHITEBREAD ROUND THE WORLD RACE
(Fifth leg, 6,670 miles, Auckland, NZ, to
São Sebastião, Brazil) 1 F League
(Swe) P Ceyard 983 miles to finish; 2
Brunet Sunergy (Neth) R Heiner +619; 3
Innovation Kraemer (Nor) K Frostad +622; 4
Ment Cup (Monaco) G Dalton +625.5; 5
Swedish Match (Swe) G Krantz +626.2; 6
Chessee Racing (US) D Smith +626.7
Joshie (US) P Standbridge + 630; 8 Sisk Cut (GB)
L Smith + 776; 9 F Education (Swe) C Gust-
on +1216.

Rugby League

By Dave Hadfield

Jackson, who has played both wing and prop for the Humber-side team, is initially on a month's loan, but could be available for a permanent move. Like the former Leeds and Bradford centre, Carl Hall, who has joined Rovers on trial,

Leigh's prop, Tim Street, has been cleared to play against Whitehaven after avoiding further punishment for his sending-off against Sheffield in the Challenge Cup last week.

Jim Rudd, who kicked off the first Wembley Challenge Cup final for Dewsbury in 1929 and died on Christmas Day at the age of 96, is to have his wish granted by having his ashes scattered behind the goals at the stadium tomorrow.

The League and the BBC are encouraged by viewing figures for this year's competition which peaked at 4.5 million for the Leeds-Castleford tie last Saturday and almost 1m for St Helens' match at Featherstone on BBC2 on Sunday.

Oarsmen to decide coach's future

Rowing

Redgrave and his partner, Matthew Pinsent, while unavailable for comment yesterday, are both believed to be backing their coach.

"We are going to have an in-house meeting with athletes

So far he has refused to confirm or deny the allegations and was unavailable for comment yesterday.

Cricket Warwickshire's Michael Bell, the 31-year-old left-arm pace bowler, will be free to join another county on 5 March after a successful appeal to the England and Wales Cricket Board for a switch to an uncontested List Two registration.

Australia's Cricket Board and the players' union meet at a secret location today with both parties appearing close to settling their long-running pay dispute.

[illegible]

Football
Arsenal have lost their last link with the great Herbert Chapman team of the 1930s with the death of the former England captain George Male at the age of 87. Male served Arsenal for more than 50 years, first as a player, then as a coach and finally a scout.
FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP Re-arranged fixtures: Wed 20 April: Chelsea v Blackburn (from 29 March).
NATIONAL LEAGUE FOOTBALL LEAGUE Postponed fixtures: Sat 20 March: Middlesbrough v Swindon.

[illegible]

Ice hockey
EXPRESS CUP Semi-finals, second legs:
Stratford 4 Bracknell 4 (agg: 5-7); Ayr 12 North-
tingham 4 (agg: 16-3).

Rugby Union
A INTERNATIONAL (Goldensands, Edinburgh)
Scotland 24 France 20.
B INTERNATIONAL (Goldensands, Edinburgh)
Scotland 6 France 22.
THURSDAY'S LATE RESULTS: Club matches
Ponypool 26 Neath 48.

Snooker
REGAL SCOTTISH OPEN (Aberdeen) Fourth
round: R. O'Sullivan (Eng) 4 v J. White (Eng) 5-3; M.
C. Scanlon (Eng) 4 v M. Bennett (Wls) 5-3.

CORP COLONISTS WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT (*Bogota*) Singles, second round
Moranku (Us) vs N Van Lottum (Fr) 6-1 7-5
MARTINIS (*Sey*) vs M Mazzotta (Us) 6-0 8-2
Martinez (Ch) vs J Kozak (Cz) 6-3 6-2
7-6 6-4 5-7
USA WOMEN'S CHALLENGER (*Radiobond*)
Singles, first round
Stevens (Us) vs S Noack (Fru) vs J Pich (Suw)
6-7 7-6 6-1
2-6 6-3 6-4
Semi-final: I. Woodcock (Austral)
vs T Kuzan (Slovak) 6-4 6-4; N Bacia (Mold)
vs K Gross (Gss) 3-7 7-5

THE GAFFER TAPES

You might not recognise me straight away as I've had some fresh ones taken to capture my new look. A month in the Central American jungle has achieved where a decade of dieting and half-a-dozen fat farms failed. I'm down to an elfin 13st and I'll be eternally grateful to Pedro, the guerrillas' cook, for his help. His bark-and-leaf quiche and cockerel casserole were so good I'm going to incorporate them

I was a bit sorry to leave Pedro and the boys. After the first week or so, when they kept me chained to the outside toilet (convenient while I got used to the grub but you had to check under the seat for black widow spiders before relaxing), they turned out to be a decent set of lads. Football's a universal language and once I said "Bobbie Charlton" and "Tonée Cascareno" they were great.

It turned out they had a team of their own and, luckily for me, needed a new manager—the old one had been tortured to death under suspicion

The players were pretty useful, all they needed was some English tactical anus. Once I'd stopped their poney passing around, stuck the highest bloke up front and told them to hoof it at his head and play for the second ball, we were flying and reached the final of the Guevars Cup. This is a big deal in guerrilla football so, before the match, I gave them all a class of teguís to

They were so delighted they offered me my freedom on condition I asked Tony Blair to set up a task force to examine their grievances. I've been to see him and pointed out that travelling in the area and asking questions is a very dangerous activity. We're hopeful David Mellor will find time to head up the group.

While I made a lot of good friends out there — and we still keep in touch through the Internet (gun.co/rebelwww) — it's good to be home, especially as I understand a few backstabbers have been active in my

With Kit gone we are a bit light on coaching staff and I'm hoping we can come to an arrangement with Raul. We've offered him a 30-minute stint, twice weekly, at £100 a session netto. Plus he gets his own personal Gatorade bottle and can sit in the good corner of the dressing-room, the one which doesn't get flooded by the

Not having seen the team play for a month I've had to take a bit of advice on selection. I checked out those papers that give players marks out of 10, averaged out performances, and came up with the best XI. After Fritz pointed out there was only one defender I made a few changes. Ivor Niggie and Shaun Prone were the unlucky ones.

**Barry Gaffer was talking
to Glenn Moore**

Elsewhere, Motherwell's caretaker manager, Jim Griffin, will take charge for the first, and probably last, time at home to title-chasing Hearts.

Terrace fashion, Istanbul style: Galatasaray fans wield inflatable ladies wearing Fenerbahce shirts during the 2-2 draw between the bitter Turkish rivals last Sunday Photograph: AP

Some 6,000 Celtic fans had taken to the streets of Vigo to protest against the ban on Tuesday, while players from all over Spain had expressed their disagreement with the ban. Many reporters felt that Salgado would not have been sanctioned at all if Juninho had not been such a high-profile player. Juninho, who returned to

The colourful striker arrived from the Brazilian club Vasco da Gama early last month after completing the league season

with Vasco, for whom he scored a record 23 goals but also received seven red cards.

"If I don't play for Fiorentina, then I'm going back to

from the World Cup finals for the first time in 20 years, will get no more wages unless they qualify for the next European Championship in the year 2000.

recalled a striker who was one of their main men at USA '94 Rashidi Yekini, now with FC Zurich. He has not played for Nigeria for two years.

Rupert Metcal

**Nationwide League
First Division**
Birmingham v Sheffield Utd (10)

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

WOMEN'S EAST PREMIER: Darnley Athletic (12); Cambridge City (11); Sevenoaks (10); Harrogate Magpies; Welton Garden City (5) St Albans.

WEST WOMEN'S Premier: Burton Vale (12); Chatterham v. Tamworth Town; Colwyn (10); Redditch; Ecomouth v. Exeter; St Albans (Lancashire).

ROYAL AL-FARSAI WOMEN'S MIDLAND PREMIER: Crimmo Rovers (North Staffs) Kettering v. Hampton - In-Arden; Loughborough Polytechnic v. Leicester.

TRYSPORTS WOMEN'S THREE COUNTIES: First Division: Milton Keynes v. Colwyn; Second Division: Keynsham v. Harrogate; Third Division: Newark v. Redditch; Harrogate; Harrogate v. Maidenshead; Oxford City v. Harrogate; Wymondsey (Walsley, Walsley) v. Bradford.

Basketball

BOWLEIGH LEAGUE: Derby Storm v. Hfford Royals (230); Manchester Giants (230); Derby Storm v. Hfford Royals (230); Thame Valley Tigers (Worcestershire) (230).

Ice hockey

OVERLEAGUE: Basingstoke Rangers v. Notts (10); Basingstoke Rangers v. Notts (10); Chard Devils (8); Sheffield Steelers v. Maidenshead (70).

Other sports

BOWLING: Professional Promotion (Watford) (10); Professional Promotion (Watford) (10).

RALLYING: Metal 1 British Championship (8 vention).

SNOOKER: Scottish Open (Aberdeen).

TOMORROW

Football

IR MARYLENS LEAGUE: Premier Division: Ashford Town v. Atherton (21).

HARP LEAGUE: NATIONAL LEAGUE (10); HARP LEAGUE: National Division: Bournemouth v. Harps (230).

[illegible]

THE WEEK

- I WILL not be making a revolution. That would be stupid. Gianluca Vialli, Chelsea's new player-manager, on taking over from Ruud Gullit.
- NO ONE stabbed Ruud in the back, not the staff or the players. This has come from the board. Vialli.
- DEATH comes quickly now in football. Kevin Keegan, former manager of Sacking United, on Gullit's sackings.
- WE have the highest paid team in the country, the players Ruud Gullit brought in. I can have the cost of season tickets for tomorrow if that's what it takes, but then they will have to put up with free transfers from the National League. Ken Bates, Chelsea chairman, on his club's massive rise in season ticket prices.

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Chelsea chairman, on his club's massive rise in season ticket prices.

Wilkins revels in the winning game

The fulcrum of Fulham's footballing renaissance is bonding both old and new at the Cottage, he tells Glenn Moore

IT IS a crisp morning in south-west London. A minute ago Ray Wilkins had grabbed hold of the base of a cast-iron goal and helped lug it into position on the dewy grass. Now he is standing chatting to an expensively dressed Brazilian, an agent seeking a trial for a promising teenage compatriot.

Welcome to Fulham, not yet a Premiership side, but not your average Nationwide League Second Division club either. Six months after Mohamed Al Fayed took over, and five months after he brought in Kevin Keegan and Wilkins, the club is still suffering from schizophrenia.

It is not just the incongruous scene at the training ground which, being hired from and shared with the BBC Sports Club, has a hockey pitch and a cafeteria in which players lunch alongside twin-set-and-pearls ladies. It is also the oddity of the division's most expensive team, playing in a dilapidated ground, watched by a support still struggling to let go of the cosy "we're crap and we don't mind" image.

"There is a lot of that about," admitted Wilkins after training. "Well, I mind and I think everybody else on my staff minds," he added, his brown eyes and smooth voice taking on an edge that is otherwise absent from the conversation. "We want to be a friendly club but we don't want anyone to beat us. We are in the results game and I won't be here if we don't win. I love being here, so I want us to win."

Wilkins and Keegan were also greeted warily when they arrived because of the sudden axing of the previous manager, Micky Adams. Have the fans now warmed to Wilkins? "I don't really know. As far as I'm concerned I'm here to do a job. Not everybody likes you - we would all like people to love us but that isn't the case. They will have their preference. That part of it doesn't really bother me. All I'm concerned about is making sure we function as a side and give them enjoyment."

"Winning helps but playing a bit of attractive football goes a long way as well. The club has a tradition of playing football, therefore it is important that we try and play along the floor."

"People say you can't pass your way out of this division but you can. Crewe did it. Before losing at Oldham last Saturday we went nine games undefeated by playing football. We have worked as hard as the opposition, then our football has come into it and we have won comfortably at times - sometimes away from home. It took a while to convince the players, it always does - there are so many people putting negatives in their heads."

That was merely one of the problems with the players. A glance around the car park shows up the disparity in dressing-room income. Last season's Third Division promotion-winning team was largely



"People say you can't pass your way out of this division, but you can" says Ray Wilkins who was yesterday busily directing Fulham's promotion push. Photograph: David Ashdown

built on free transfers. Now Fulham are spending £2m on one player (Chris Coleman from Blackburn). Saturday's team had just three players inherited by Wilkins of whom only one, Matty Lawrence, was in the promotion team.

Many others remain, playing reserve team football, and Wilkins admitted bonding new and old had

been "tough". To help the process, first team and reserves train together, either in the entire 31-man squad or as defenders, midfielders and forwards. Group lunches have helped as have the day-to-day trappings of Al Fayed's investment, such as more luxurious accommodation and travel for away games. However, Wilkins admits that some would prefer to be

playing in the first team than having a trouser press in their hotel room.

Training did suggest a happy club, however, and Wilkins added: "We've tried to treat everybody with the same respect and give everybody a chance. We still have players who were here when we arrived. They are all very happy, they work their socks off and it is nice to know if someone

is injured I have no qualms whatsoever putting someone in. I have seen some improvement in every player at the club and that is down to them being prepared to work hard."

The coaching aspect of the job is what drew Wilkins, sacked by Queen's Park Rangers after they were relegated, back to management when he could have settled for tele-

vision punditry, advertising and suchlike. "The bit I enjoy is getting out there with the lads. You still think you can play [he won 84 England caps and his clubs included Manchester United, Chelsea, Milan and Rangers]. I can't, but it is nice to get out there and pitch yourself against them."

"We are in the winning game and

I want to win but I get an enormous kick out of seeing people improve, seeing them do something on a Saturday that you might have done on the training ground with them. It shows that what you say is being taken on board."

Wilkins does more coaching than he did at QPR but does little else differently. "The hardest thing there was that I was working with a group of mates - they were team-mates a few months before. I sincerely hope Gianluca Vialli handles that side of it at Chelsea because I found it a problem. They were my friends and suddenly you have to go in and boss them. I very seldom bollock people. I prefer to talk to them but even that was difficult. However, judging by last [Wednesday] night he'll do very well."

Wilkins and Keegan are doing well themselves, too. Fulham, who host Wigan today, have risen to the play-off places which are being keenly contested behind the leaders, Watford, and Bristol City. That pair look certain for automatic promotion but have stumbled recently and Wilkins insists they can be caught. "We have to be ready. It has been a problem getting players to drop down to this division but it does give them extra impetus to make sure we get out. That has been a real plus in the dressing-room. Before games, they really are quite hyped up."

Given that Fulham have spent the vast sum, at this level, of £5m on players few Second Division fans want to see Fulham succeed. "There is a lot of resentment on opposition terraces but they only have to look around at the stadiums they are playing in: there are a lot of £6m stands in this division. We have put the money on the field. Our stadium is an old stadium but supporters don't mind getting wet through if the team is winning. If we get where we want to - and Fulham can be a Premiership club - we will probably build a new stadium [on the same site] but initially we will invest on the field."

This argument ignores the economics of stand-building, heavily financed by Football Trust grants, against team-building but Al Fayed's investment is not just short-term. Fulham are searching for their own training ground and expanding their youth system to, ideally, include an academy.

This, and the proposed new ground, is all part of Kevin Keegan's mandate as chief operating officer but he still gets involved on the training ground. Earlier, he had taken Paul Peschisolidi aside for an intensive session and Wilkins said: "He does a lot of individual bits with players and they have benefited from it."

"Kevin has an overall look on the club. Obviously we discuss the transfer situation, players coming in and going out, but I pick the side and, with [former QPR manager] Frank Sibley, deal with the first team."

Wilkins' contact with Al Fayed has been limited to a handful of meetings but he noted: "He comes to the home games, he's starting to enjoy himself and that is important for him. He's had a very, very difficult period: there has been a lot on his mind. Now he's enjoying his football, it's a break for him, and that's a bit of a bonus."

Get back to where you once belonged

IF MY knowledge of music serves me right, and it was *Odyssey* who sang about packing up their boots and going back to their roots, then they must have had an insight into the mentality of footballers.

Because as much as football likes to portray itself as a forward-thinking industry, it also likes to keep one boot planted firmly in the past by looking back nostalgically in the misguided hope of being able to recreate former glories, conveniently forgetting the old adage that things are seldom as good the second time around.

That said, there are exceptions that prove the rule. Going back is OK, for instance, if you are Steve Claridge and were released prematurely by your hometown club as a teenager when Alan Ball was in charge.

Going back is probably OK if you are Alan Ball and you took Portsmouth down last time (Ball admittedly got Pompey promoted to the top flight in the first place, but it was short-lived to say the least) so things cannot really get much worse this time.

Can they? Going back is OK, too, if you are Peter Beardsley and were to all intents and purposes being put out to grass at St James' Park

(although Beardsley was still better than most of the players Kenny Dalglish has put out onto grass at Newcastle).

And if you are Graeme Le Saux and have metamorphosed from unconvincing winger into roaming full-back while you were away.

And going back is definitely OK if you are Julian Dicks and should never have gone away from Upton Park in the first place. Dicks, whose spell at Liverpool was short and not at all sweet, is not nicknamed the terminator for nothing.

However, going back was not OK for Dicks' erstwhile team-mate, Tony Cottee. Cottee says that when he left West Ham he never thought he would be back.

"I felt I had done as much as I could there and that I was going to a big club where I would score lots of goals and win the Championship and play for England," he says, which would have been alright had Cottee not chosen to sign for Everton.

But while he described his return as "coming home", others saw it differently, the Hammers fanzine calling Cottee "a poor shadow of the once prolific doyen of Upton Park".

Similar sentiments could be applied to Jürgen Klinsmann, who started the rot this season.



OLIVIA BLAIR ON PLAYERS WHO RETURN TO THEIR OLD HUNTING GROUND

The German's prodigal son-like return to White Hart Lane was the best thing to have happened to Spurs all season, but that says more about the club's season than about Klinsmann's form.

The fact he had recently been substituted at Sampdoria in favour of, er, Daniele Di Chio should have been enough of a clue; as it is, his impact at Spurs has been minimal - no dive, no bicycle kick; one goal in seven games, a few nice touches and another horrific facial injury.

No, the first time was always going to be the sweetest, for sure. That's something

lan Wright and Richard Gough would do well to remember. Wright claimed recently that he would not mind ending his days at Crystal Palace, a statement which smacked more of him realising his Highbury boneyard is nearing its end than of any overwhelming affection for his former south London club.

Gough, meanwhile, won nine consecutive League titles with Rangers before pledging his future to Kansas City Wizards. That future lasted just three months, until Gough was persuaded to return to a Rangers side that looks a patch on its former self: struggling to contain the challenge of Hearts at the top of the table, and with hardly a Scotsman in sight. Ten-in-a-row will be more of a struggle than nine ever was.

Then of course there is Howard Kendall, back for a third spell at Everton, who had previously sacked Joe Royle (where he was cast in the role of saviour of the club he used to play for) because he wasn't up to the job.

Now Royle has reappeared at Maine Road, cast in the role of saviour of the club he used to play for. (Any minute now and he will be bringing in a former City defender as his assistant.) Perhaps Royle thinks

being an ex-Blue will stand him in good stead. For City's sake let us hope so, but it was not much of an advantage to Peter Reid in the long run.

And it is doubtful to be much of an advantage to Diego Maradona should he eventually claim the role of Napoli's president/player/manager he is rumoured to covet so much.

Maradona is still a legend in Napoli, whom he inspired to two *Scudetti*, one UEFA Cup (in 1989) and one Italian Cup.

But the club have gone through three managers this season, have won just two games and are rock bottom of Serie A. They need a miracle, never mind Maradona, to save them now.

Perhaps the secret is never to leave in the first place, although that is unrealistic in a game as transient as football and anyway, Matt Le Tissier is proof that you only truly learn to fly by spreading your wings. Unless you are Steve Bull, that is.

But football players and managers tend to be fairly insecure people who in times of need will always gravitate towards their former successful stamping grounds. They would do well to realise that cover versions are seldom as good as the original.

Fall and rise of princes of wails

MATCHDAY mornings were a magic day for me as a kid. On waking I'd leap out of bed and test the stretchability of my 100 per cent polyester nightwear by releasing a stinging shot on an imaginary ball in the style of Tommy Tynan, the greatest striker this country has ever seen.

Every League club has their striker hero, and from the late 1970s to 1983 Tommy was the King of Somerton Park and Newport County. That was when Newport were lower League; 10 years down the line the words "non-League" now appear before my team's name - although this change of circumstance, and of name, was a full decade of misery away at this stage.

I clearly remember my first game and on that day grandly announcing to my grandfather (like my father, a lifelong County fan) that I was going to Newport County Stadium, only for them to exchange guffaws. This was my first inkling that all was not what I thought it may be.

I was not disappointed when I got there. We held Grimsby Town 1-1 that magic day and I was in awe at being in the middle of a group of grown men while being allowed to hear them swear and pretend to understand their jokes about the centre-half with the big arse.

These first few years of life as a County fan were spent in a blind state of innocence, made easier by promotion from the old Fourth Division in my second season (1979/80) on top of winning the Welsh Cup.

Football life was one big adventure and as a consequence of our Cup victory we had a European adventure to enjoy. Following the disposal of the custodians of the Irish and Norwegian cups we were drawn against the East Ger-

man side Carl-Zeiss Jena. In East Germany our brave lads got a draw and we were confident for the second leg. But they beat us 1-0.

We murdered them that night and everyone lost count of the number of goalline clearances they made. Only the absence of a Russian linesman stopped us getting the goal that would have taken us to the Stadium of Light and a semi-final with Benfica. At the final whistle my chubby cheeks burned with

tears of disbelief, my time of innocence at an end. Not long afterwards, our fortunes took a turn for the worse and, to cut a long, sad story short, we had to resort to not only selling our best players to survive, as had always been the case, but also our worst players. We sold the ground, the tea urn, the reserve team kit and club cat, all in a bid to boost the club's coffers. All to no avail.

In the final years we went through more demotions than a sergeant caught in bed with the colonel's wife.

But from the ashes of the County came a new team. The imaginatively named Newport AFC came and stole my heart. Through several years of promotion, relegation, being exiled to England by the Welsh FA and having Somerton Park demolished they have come through with flying colours. Well, drifting colours anyway.

Premiership supporters would not recognise this other world. In our league, away fans can be counted on one hand and the only queues are for the burger van when the onions have cooked. But we've got back our pride and our ambition, we're alive and can show worried supporters of the likes of Doncaster and Brighton that life can go on after humiliation and despair.

FAN'S EYE
VIEW
NO 245
NEWPORT AFC
BY
ANDREW
HUMPHRIES

such spectacular progress that it will rank as a major upset if Burnley end 75 years without a win at Highfield Road.

Strachan, whom Chelsea's new player-manager cited with Ferguson and Wenger as the three to whose standards he aspired, must decide whether to restore the snip of the season, George Boateng, after the £250,000 midfielder's absence with the Dutch Under-21s.

As the man who once said that if he had made Eric Cantona's remarks about sardines and trawlers, people would have thought he was "just a wee Scottish bum talking crap", we can safely assume that Strachan will not be discouraging on the merits or otherwise of squad rotation.

Age		Phased Red	Phased Yell	Phased	Assess	
000	1 Country	26	5	51	76	292
003	2 Leads	26	3	54	69	276
007	3 Eviction	26	4	51	71	273
010	4 Botton	26	4	47	67	268
014	5 Chelsea	25	3	51	66	264
019	6 Arsenal	26	2	50	63	260
023	7 Derby	27	1	57	62	280
027	8 Black Wid	26	4	44	69	277
031	9 Blackburn	26	3	51	66	273
035	10 Clapton	26	3	39	54	231
039	11 Newcastle	25	2	41	51	204
043	12 West Ham	26	2	43	53	204
047	13 Luton	26	1	43	48	195
051	14 Man Utd	26	0	44	44	169
055	15 Liverpool	26	1	36	41	159
059	16 Middlesbrough	25	0	38	58	158
063	17 Tottenham	26	0	40	46	154
067	18 Bolton	26	0	38	46	148
071	19 Leicester	26	0	39	38	146
075	20 Spurs	26	1	33	39	138
079	21 Villa	26	1	30	35	135

(Red cards: Spots, Yellow: 1/2)



SPORT

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Saturday 21 February 1998

Fallon told me he stopped Top Cees, says TV presenter

Racing

By Richard Edmondson and Greg Wood

THE LIBEL trial which is currently the focus of the racing world was yesterday told by Derek Thompson, the Channel 4 racing presenter, that Kieren Fallon, the champion jockey, told him that he had deliberately prevented the horse from winning the race in question on the instructions of Jack Ramsden, the husband of the horse's trainer, Lynda. Fallon, subsequently recalled to the witness box, denied the suggestion.

Fallon and the Ramsdens are suing *The Sporting Life* over an unsigned editorial in May 1995 after the horse, Top Cees, won the Chester Cup. The editorial suggested all three had "stopped" the horse from winning the race. Fallon, who was subpoenaed on his return from working in Dubai on Monday, said he felt that the horse "probably should have finished an awful lot closer with a more forceful ride, and probably should have won".

On the night of the race, he was dining with friends at the Old Plough pub near Newmarket, when he saw Fallon. He told the court: "I don't want to repeat this in open court, which is why I've tried to stop it coming to open court because it was said to me in confidence. I was asking

Sporting Life, deny libel. They say the article was justified and fair comment on a "scandal" that was a matter of public interest.

The newspaper's counsel, Richard Hartley QC, who had earlier said that his best evidence would be if he could produce someone who had overheard someone telling Fallon not to win at Newmarket - asked Thompson in the High Court in London for his reaction to the result of the Swaffham Handicap.

Thompson, who was subpoenaed on his return from working in Dubai on Monday, said he felt that the horse "probably should have finished an awful lot closer with a more forceful ride, and probably should have won".

On the night of the race, he was dining with friends at the Old Plough pub near Newmarket, when he saw Fallon. He told the court: "I don't want to repeat this in open court, which is why I've tried to stop it coming to open court because it was said to me in confidence. I was asking

"What happened with Top Cees this afternoon as I thought he would win" and Kieren's words were, "Yes, I thought the horse would win as well but when I got into the paddock Jack told me to stop it."

"It might have been said flippantly, he might have had a couple too many, I am just repeating what he said to me one night in the pub."

Thompson said that he mentioned the conversation to a couple of people at the next morning's Channel Four production meeting and suggested it might be worth interviewing Fallon, as "Top Cees" failure to win was a major racing story.

"Kieren was obviously quite reluctant... he was being hounded by the press, if that's the right word, so I said: 'It will do you good to talk about it.'"

"I did say that what was said last night in The Plough will not come out and I will look after you." He added: "I knew Kieren as a very good jockey, although

not socially. I admired him greatly as a super horseman."

He said he was reluctant to become involved in the case because he had no desire to get involved with litigation between people he knew on both sides. "It's as simple as that. I did not want this to come out."

Patrick Milmo QC, for the Ramsdens and Fallon, opened his cross-examination by saying: "What you have just told the court about Kieren Fallon is an outrageous lie - that's right, is it not?"

Thompson: "If you think so, that's up to you. But no, it's not."

Milmo: "I'm putting that to you, Mr Thompson, I want you to face it. My question is what you have just said about Kieren Fallon, sitting down there on that front bench, is an outrageous lie."

Thompson: "That is incorrect."

Milmo alleged that Thompson had been "boasting" to his Channel 4 colleagues that Fallon had confided in him about being told to pull Top Cees.

Thompson: "The word 'boasting' is not correct."

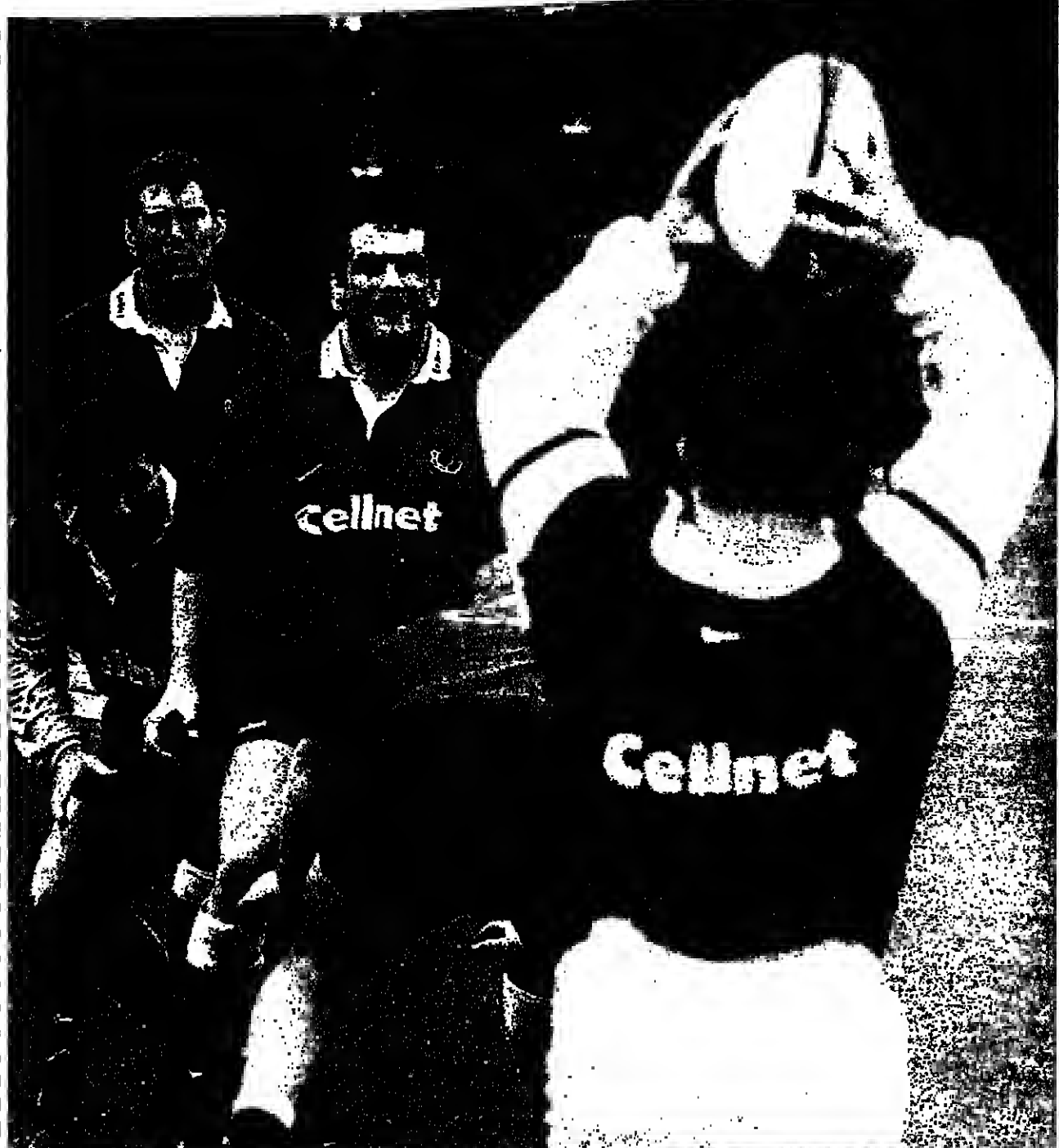
He said that what was said by him in the production meeting was confidential. "It's the same reason you might talk to people in chambers. It was off the record and you would be annoyed if it was repeated elsewhere."

Fallon himself was recalled to the stand to rebut Thompson's version of events at the Old Plough. "I wouldn't have said anything like that," Fallon told Milmo. "I wouldn't call Mr Ramsden 'Jack'. I'd call him Mr Ramsden."

Later, Milmo asked if there was any truth in the allegation that he had deliberately stopped Top Cees winning.

"No," Fallon said. "Something like that would be terrible. For any jockey to even think about stopping a horse would jeopardise their career. What Mr Thompson has invented is a lie. Mr Ramsden has never asked me to stop a horse as long as I've ridden for him, or Mrs Ramsden for that matter."

Cross-examined by Hartley, he denied that it would be easy for a rider of his ability to stop a horse. "You could find trouble, not take the gaps?" Hartley asked. "You're going at 35 miles per hour, three inches from the horse in front," Fallon replied. "You don't look for trouble, you try to avoid it."



Martin Johnson (centre) 'needs to punch his weight' against Wales at Twickenham today

Photograph: David Ashdown

Woodward faces watershed

Chris Hewett
Rugby Union Correspondent

THIS is it, then: sink or swim, do or die, put up or shut up. Clive Woodward could not have imagined things would reach such a pretty pass so soon in his tenure as England coach; indeed, it is perfectly possible that he does not consider today's Five Nations dust-up with Wales to be a watershed occasion at all. In which case, he sees things rather differently to the 78,000 who will sit in judgement on him at Twickenham this afternoon.

Woodward is not on trial to the degree that Jack Rowell found himself on that win-or-lose Calcutta Cup day in Edinburgh two years ago. But defeat at the hands of the Welsh would not only signal the end of a long honeymoon with an English sporting public swept off its feet by seductive words, it would also set the tone for an old-fashioned door-slaming, furniture-throwing domestic with the coach's grey-suited in-laws at the Rugby Football Union.

It is now seven Tests since England's sweet chariot made it all the way to the chequered flag and the record of the Woodward regime is two draws and three defeats from five outings. No one is on the phone to Dial-a-Tumbler just at the moment - New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and France are the Real McCoy's of world rugby, after all - but today, the coach takes on a second-class power for the first time. As Roger Untley, the England manager, admitted this week, a had one against Wales will inevitably lead to "questions being asked in high places".

Worryingly for Woodward, it is not merely a question of England avoiding a second

successive "had one". What Lawrence Dallaglio and company need is an extremely "good one", just to see off a Welsh side unusually confident of translating their paper potential to the green grass of the playing field.

It is 20 years since the seven wonders of the valleys - Gareth, Gerald, Phil, JPR and the Pontypool front row - bestrode the rugby landscape and seldom since have the red shirts poured across the Severn in such high spirits.

Arwel Thomas, the magically gifted outside-half from Swansea, articulated the feel-good factor this week by saying: "If the pack gives us some runnaball, we'll win. We have more idea behind the scrum because we've got better players, man for man, from nine to 15."

"England have played all the top-quality sides under Woodward and shown signs of moving away from the kicking game but if winning is a habit, it's a habit they don't have at the moment. We definitely fancy this one."

Thomas will fancy it a whole lot more if England's reshaped front-row trio speed the afternoon peering into their own darkened recesses, as the previous incarnation did in Paris a fortnight ago. Phil Vickery, the all-important oew cap on the tight head, has been exposed early to the rigours of international duty, presumably because Woodward does not believe the Welsh scrummagers will prove nearly as troublesome as Christian Calmano and Franck Tournaire. He may be right on that score, but Andrew Lewis is playing the best rugby of his career and the outcome of his tête-à-tête with Vickery will be fundamental to the outcome.

As, indeed, will the performance of England's back five. Martin Johnson is on a husband's holiday at the moment and for all Untley's pseudo-babble about staleness and burn-out, it is high time the Lions captain raised a gallop and concentrated on punching

his weight in the rucks and mauls rather than than punching opposition backs. The Welsh have no second row in the same universe - indeed, they have no one as good as Gareth Archer, either - and knife-edge Tests are usually won by the side capitalising on the odd area of clear superiority.

Unless Johnson and Archer help secure the English scrummage, Dallaglio and his extravagantly equipped back-row confreres will be sitting ducks for the second time in as many matches. As Olivier Magne, the outstanding French flanker, pointed out in Paris, the scrum is once again the most influential physical and psychological theatre of rugby action. "No one plays this game going backwards," he said. "At least, they don't if they're serious about winning."

An even contest at the sharp end should ensure a compelling battle of wits in midfield, where the quartet of centres from last summer's Lions tour of South Africa are preparing to lock horns in a four-cornered game of full-contact chess. One of them, Jeremy Guscott, wins his 50th cap this afternoon and with characteristic swagger, he says he relishes the fact that he will be opposed by Allan Bateman, whom he describes as "the best centre in the world".

But Guscott's animal instinct ensures he will keep one eye fixed on Bateman's partner, Scott Gibbs. "I don't know how he does it, but Jerry has survived the best part of a decade at the top level without getting a slumping," said the Swansea hitman yesterday, a disconcerting smile faintly visible on his deceptively studious features. The message was clear: Gibbs owes Guscott, but Wales owe England even more.

ENGLAND v WALES			
at Twickenham			
M Perry	Bath	15 N Jenkins	Pontypridd
D Rees	Sale	14 G Thomas	Cardiff
W Greenwood	Leicester	13 A Bateman	Richmond
J Guscott	Bath	12 S Gibbs	Swansea
A Healey	Leicester	11 N Waller	Cardiff
P Grayson	Northampton	10 A Thomas	Swansea
K Bracken	Saracens	9 R Howley	Cardiff
J Leonard	Harlequins	1 A Lewis	Cardiff
R Cockerill	Leicester	2 B Williams	Richmond
P Vickery	Gloucester	2 D Young	Cardiff
M Johnson	Leicester	4 G Llewellyn	Harlequins
G Archer	Newcastle	5 M Voyle	Llanelli
L Dallaglio	Wasps	6 C Charvis	Swansea
N Back	Leicester	7 M Williams	Pontypridd
R Hill	Saracens	8 S Quinell	Richmond
Replacements: 16 M Catt (Bath); 17 P de Gierville (Bath); 18 M Dawson (Northampton); 19 A Diprose (20 D Greenwood (both Saracens); 21 D Gifford; 22 D West (both Leicester).			
Referee: C Hawke (New Zealand)		Kick-off: 2.0 (Sky Sports 2)	

England give Italians chance to make up the 'Six Nations'

By Chris Hewett

IT TOOK them far too long to get round to it, but England finally fell in line with the rest of northern hemisphere rugby yesterday by officially inviting Italy to the Five Nations party. The oldest international championship in the game will become the Six Nations from the spring of

the year 2000 - a new tournament for a new millennium.

Rugby Football Union council members agreed unanimously to extend the competition. France, Ireland and Scotland, all of whom had recently been beaten by Italy, confirmed their support at a meeting in January, as did Wales, who secured a narrow

three-point victory over the oew boys only a fortnight ago. Vernon Pugh, a Five Nations Committee member, congratulated Giancarlo Dondi, the president of the Italian Rugby Union. "This must be a very proud day for him," said Pugh. "We were all very impressed by the professional and persuasive arguments made by the Ital-

ians both on and off the field."

The deserving Italians will be the first Five Nations newcomers since France, who were granted a place in 1910.

England's top clubs reached agreement with the Rugby Football Union yesterday over plans to extend Allied Dunbar Premiership One by two clubs to 14 next season. With no relegation this season, the news comes as a major boost to Bristol and London Irish, who currently occupy the bottom two positions in Premiership One.

Matiness of the man with a mike

DEREK THOMPSON, the racing journalist whose evidence in *The Sporting Life* libel trial caused such a stir yesterday, is best-known as the member of the Channel 4 team whose watchwords might be: have mike, will interview.

Thompson, 47, has established a reputation that he will talk to anyone, indeed to anything - from the champion jockey to a goat. His wide range and uncrushable matiness have some praising his consummate professionalism, others reaching for the sick bag.

Thompson's style is vooer-smooth - it has been said he is veneer all the way through - with an almost permanently fixed smile (false at times, he admits) and a manner that is sometimes undeniably patronising. He tends to be given the lightweight, off-beat spots on Channel 4 and aims for populist appeal, but he is by no means everyone's cup of tea.

The biographical blurb on the inside flap of the cover of his recently published book *Thommo's Year* gives his nickname as "The Master of the Microphone". Many, however, know him as "The Nodding Dog", a reference to the constant head-bobbing that accompanies many interviews, or "Toilet" Thomp-

Sue Montgomery
on the reporter
who will talk to
anyone, or anything

son. The goat, a racehorse's companion, is to blame for the latter as viewers were informed: "Oh look, it's doing a pooh."

"Tommo" is legion, and Lester Piggott, never one to waste words, apparently told him to "F*** off" in front of a worldwide audience of hundreds of millions on Derby Day in 1983.

Derek Thompson arriving at court yesterday

Photograph: Philip Meech

He undoubtedly enjoys the celebrity status that TV exposure has given him, but then an ego of a certain size is not uncommon in visual media work. And to his credit, the man also gives the impression he would carry on interviewing if someone set his trousers on fire. In his book, the show must go on.

Thompson earns his living as a TV presenter, as a commentator for Satellite Information Services (the service which shows live racing in betting shops) and at Nad El Sheba racecourse in Dubai. He also contributes to the Irish television station RTE and has his name on a premium-rate tipping line.

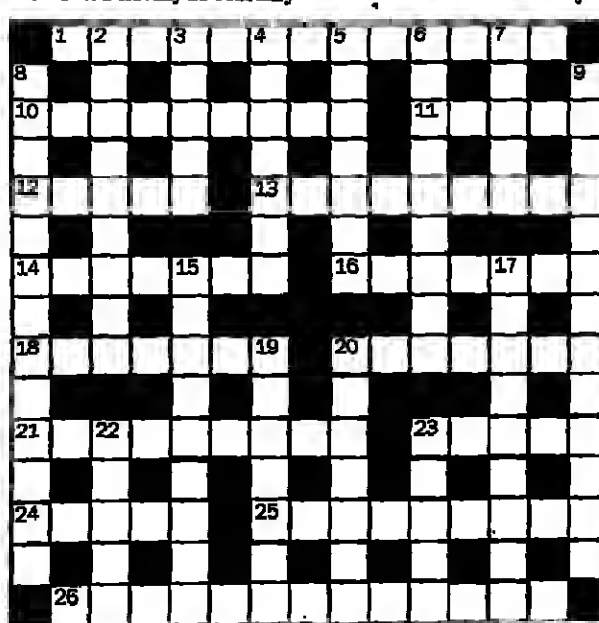
His made his debut with a microphone at the age of 15, while still at Gaisborough Grammar School, when he called the runners home at his local Cleveland point-to-point.

After he left school at 17, he gained first-hand experience of horses, working for periods of six months each for the Bishop Auckland trainer Denys Smith and Pierre Sanoner at Chantilly, and rode in several amateur races on the Flat and over jumps, famously beating the Prince Of Wales in a close finish at Plumpton in 1980 for his only victory.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3540, Saturday 21 February

By Phil



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution

ANSWERS TO FRIDAY'S CROSSWORD: 1 Across: NEW WORLD; 2 Down: MORRIS; 3 Across: ITALY; 4 Down: DI CAMP; 5 Across: BATH; 6 Down: CHOCOLATES; 7 Across: JOURNALISM; 8 Down: PAINT; 9 Across: REACTION; 10 Down: URBAN; 11 Across: FACTORY; 12 Down: MOTORIST; 13 Across: KNEE; 14 Down: UNINTENTIONALLY; 15 Across: HUNT; 16 Down: COW; 17 Across: CRUSADING; 18 Down: LUNGEON; 19 Across: SHILL; 20 Down: RESORT; 21 Across: COLLIE; 22 Down: CYGNET.

ACROSS

- Developed an artistic sense (something not shared by everyone) (8,5)
- Once again appearing as new in turbulent art scene (9)
- Murphy runs behind gallery (5)
- See female in sun bonnet in ray of sunlight (5)
- Pursuing about "alternative" clothes (9)
- Not breaking the law, locating home in Orkney island (7)
- Fanatic adult that is lacking first signs of wit and nous (7)
- Waits, having obligations about arrival (7)
- Disputable ally in very long surrounding - here's a little of the volume (3,4)
- Amibious type - one of the jet-set? (4,5)
- Lad hangs around Post Office to trifle amorously (5)
- Beak imprisons one making a row (5)
- Just time to get into US University? That's a lie! (9)
- Tennis on the radio perhaps provokes disagreement (4,2,3,4)

DOWN

- Unfortunate reaction when injecting new pet? (9)
- On horseback, and read for a fall? (5)
- "Later arrival - regret losing power" - railway (2,5)
- Director-General restricts what's excessive in making points (7)
- It'll involve moon, star and galaxy ultimately (9)
- No good avoiding showing disapproval together (5)
- It shows you a shade angry over egg production (5,8)
- One inches to send ball flying (7,6)
- An inflexible attitude infers heads of some firms, unfortunately (9)
- Use "parrot" loosely for this old flying creature (9)
- What can do for such a meal - can small fish? (4,3)
- Supply vase to be put in angle (7)
- Forbidding the introduction of erotic fifth (5)
- Pen a couple of letters in a certain manner (5)

The first five correct solutions to this week's puzzle opened on Thursday receive hand-drawn copies of the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. Answers and winners' names will be published next Saturday. Send solutions to Saturday Crossword, P.O. Box 4018, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 3BL. Please use the box number and postcode and give your own postcode. Last week's winners: A Cooper, Lannington, Spax, J McCallough, Preston, D Bristenden, Westcham, A Kelly, Limerick, G Watkins, Portishead.



YOUR MONEY

PERSONAL FINANCE, PROPERTY & MOTORING

Saturday 21 February 1998



Watch this space: it's time to liven up your living space with an unusual clock. Timekeepers for every taste and budget, in 'Property' on page 10

Photograph: Tom Pilton

Learn lessons from the master money makers

Only a handful of professionals outperform the markets consistently over time. But, as Jonathan Davis explains, they make investors a fortune

Who would not want to be a professional investment manager? On the face of it, there are few better jobs to be had. After football players and pop stars, there are few industries in which the top performers are so handsomely rewarded. The hull market of the past 15 years has made the profession one of the most highly sought after in the City. Salaries for those who can demonstrate that they are one of the handful of truly exceptional talents can easily run into the high six figures, with matching bonuses on top.

Investment is one of the most highly competitive businesses on earth and to produce exceptional returns year in, year out is at least as great a challenge as winning an Olympic medal. A handful of professionals do, however, have what the Nobel economics laureate Paul Samuelson calls the elusive extra "performance quotient".

Having spent a year on an in-depth study of eight of the most successful professional investors in

Britain, with the idea of trying to establish what have been the major factors behind their success, I can report that the qualities you need to succeed in this demanding business are not the ones which the ordinary investor might at first imagine. The eight I looked at include some of the best-known names in the business.

All these investors have the same objective: to produce returns that exceed those of the market as a whole. But their way of setting about doing so could not be more different. All of them are versed in the art of balance-sheet analysis. All have their own distinctive valuation techniques, which they are happy to describe in detail.

Some, such as Anthony Bolton and Jim Slater, are out-and-out stockpickers. They look for exceptional performing shares, rather than taking overall views on the direction of markets.

Bolton is big on detailed company research. His two funds, which cover the UK and Europe, specialise in

finding out-of-favour companies that other investors are shunning for one reason or another; something formerly owned by Robert Maxwell, or nuclear power companies which nobody understands, are the sort of things he loves. Such shares are often irrationally undervalued and make large gains when they return to favour.

Slater has his own screening system for finding growth shares that are not yet fully valued by the market, based initially on the ratio between their earnings and the rating those earnings are accorded in the market. He likes to back broad investment themes (such as the spread of sports retailing and the Millennium bug) and also keeps a very close eye on directors' share dealings. His "Zulu Principle" holds that you do best by sticking to a few companies you can really become an expert on rather than trying to work out how entire industries or the economy as a whole is moving.

Other investors prefer to take a broader view. Mark Mobius, a 60-year-old fitness freak, spends 80 per cent of his time flying around the globe in a private jet looking for bargains in more than 30 different emerging markets. Ian Rushbrook, who runs Personal Assets in Edinburgh, uses his own sophisticated computer models to help him try and decide if the markets are over-valued or not.

Nils Taube, Sir Jacob Rothschild's stock market adviser, specialises in spotting broad international trends that can be expected to head towards the UK and Europe. He was one of the first, 30 years ago, to spot the huge potential growth in supermarkets: now he is busy making money from betting on the continued consolidation of Europe's financial and banking system.

So no two methods for success are the same. As Anthony Bolton told me: "If you are going to out-perform the market, by definition you have to do something which is different

from what everyone else is doing."

It all sounds very easy, at least until you try to do it. Going against conventional opinion is something most of us find difficult to do. That is why many successful investors are essentially loners.

The paradox is that there is much less mystique about investment than is often realised. Some of the adages you need to succeed – for example, to run your profits and cut your losses – are almost as old as the hills. Yet few of us actually follow the advice. Buying the most popular shares in the markets, for example those with the highest price-earnings ratios, have been repeatedly shown to be a sure-fire route to long-term underperformance. Yet most investors, many professionals included, persist in doing just that.

In principle, there is no reason, most of the experts insist, why private investors cannot do just as well as the average professional investor. Although their information sources

are not so good, they have the advantages of having smaller funds to manage. They can afford to take a genuinely long-term view, a luxury that is in practice denied to most professional investment managers. In Anthony Bolton's words, there is actually very little original thought in investment. It is putting the wisdom of the ages into practice that is so difficult. Putting your money with the genuine superstars, provided you can spot them early enough, is just as good a strategy for long-term success in the stock market as any.

'Money Makers': by The Independent's Jonathan Davis, a study of Britain's most successful professional investors, and what ordinary investors can learn from them, is published by Orion Business Books at £20. To order a copy at the specially discounted price of £15 (including P&P) call 01903 736736 and quote the reference number MMJD.

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CLIFFORD GERMAN

Budget on a rates rise

Freshly armed with a five-year mandate as the Inflation-Finder General, Eddie George can now afford to make long-term decisions on interest rates. But he is unlikely to want to change interest rates until he and his colleagues on the monetary committee have seen what the Chancellor does with the tax weapon in the Budget.

Interest rates and tax rates are two blades of the scissors the authorities traditionally use to trim the economy. Higher taxes and higher interest rates both slow the economy down while tax cuts and interest-rate cuts will speed it up, but tax changes and interest-rate changes work in slightly different ways because higher interest rates reward savers as well as penalising borrowers, while higher taxes reduce spending power across the whole economy and also reduce the government's budget deficit.

On past experience, tax changes affect spending and investment within a year whereas the Bank of England argues that changing interest rates can take up to two

years to work through the system. Interest rates seem to have more impact on inflation and exchange rates, but if there is a right time to raise taxes it is in the early years of a government when the next election is far away.

Some members of the Bank of England's monetary committee think another rise in interest rates is needed to discourage borrowing and consumer spending and to puncture the inflationary boom in house prices.

But a rise in interest rates would make sterling even stronger and hurt exporters as well as reducing growth in the next two years and widening the gap between the UK and Europe at a time when pro-Europeans want it to narrow.

(How much better, dear reader, if the incoming Government had done what this column argued last summer and raised interest rates sharply to show it meant to control inflation and, at the same time, outflank the currency speculators at a stroke, because by now we could be reducing rates again to soften

the downturn rather than risking making it worse.)

Either way the next move is up to the Chancellor. The business community would like to see (personal) taxation rise so that interest rates and sterling could come down faster, but the record surge in tax receipts last month has brought the prospect of a budget surplus in 1999-2000 and there seems to be no need for a general rise in taxation next month.

Increases in tax on petrol and tobacco are certain, reforms in National Insurance, capital gains tax and inheritance tax are likely, tax relief on mortgage interest might well be phased out, and the married couples' allowance replaced by a restored child tax allowance. More tinkering with the taxation of pensions and savings, including firm plans for Individual Savings Accounts, seems certain and there could even be tax cuts on booze plus a long-promised 10p rate of tax.

But the fine-tuning of policy will be left to the Bank of England and its interest-rate committee.

MONEY MAKEOVER

Put your capital to work when you retire

Name: Joan Denton

Age: 60

Occupation: Retired

The problem: Joan, from Norfolk, has recently retired and has purchased a house for cash.

She wants to maximise income to bring her as close as possible to her pre-retirement level of £9,500 per annum net, while taking as little risk as possible. Joan would prefer guaranteed income that would rise over time. Her other concern is that she may require residential care at some point in the future.

Joan's occupational pension scheme income amounts to £2,089 pa, which combined with State pension benefits will provide income of £5,731 pa. She also has an additional voluntary contribution (AVC) fund of £4,378, but is confused as to the options available to her. Joan has around £65,000 in



Long-term care: Joan Denton does not need to see her income fall drastically after she retires. Photograph: Bryn Colton

a Halifax Gold Account, £20,000 in Premium Bonds and around £4,000 of "emergency" funds split between a Barclays deposit account and The Saffron Walden building society. Joan

wishes to invest around £85,000 for future income in total.

The Adviser: Paul Smith, specialist consultant at Stirling Asset Management Ltd, 85a Great Portland Street, London, W1N 6JR, 0171 580 1555.

The Advice: The simplest part of Joan's restructuring is the purchase of an annuity with her pension AVC pot. Those funds are held with Equitable Life who have offered three annuities: a flat annuity at £340 pa, an annuity of £240 pa escalating at 3 per cent pa and an annuity of £220 pa escalating at the retail price index (RPI).

Under occupational pension regulations Joan has no alternative other than to buy an annuity with her AVC fund. The principles behind an annuity are straightforward. Buying one is a bit like a bet with an insurance company, in return for your cash they will pay you an income for life. If you die early they keep your lump sum and in effect win the bet, if you live to a ripe old age, they lose!

But the amount of annuity offered will vary depending on the company, the age of the purchaser and the type purchased. Annuity rates can vary between companies and may differ by 20 per cent. Shopping around will pay off every time.

As Joan's other pension income is indexed and her AVC pot is quite small, the level annuity offered by Equitable Life would be the best choice.

It is not inconceivable that Joan may require income for another 30 years. A considerable proportion of her capital is in premium bonds, which generate no specific growth or income but can, and have, provided Joan with regular wins ranging from £50 to £150 per month. The marketing literature for premium bonds says anyone holding the maximum number of £20,000 will, with average luck, win 13 times a year and enjoy returns of around 5 per cent pa tax free. Having said this, there is no guarantee Joan will have average luck and, as a lower-rate tax payer, the tax-free element has less effect.

The only way to absolutely guarantee future rising income would be to pool the available resources and purchase a life annuity linked to the RPI. Unfortunately, the maximum annuity indexation that most life companies offer as a matter of routine is 8.5 per cent pa and they only quote fully inflation-protected life annuities under special circumstances. An annuity based on £85,000 could provide Joan about £6,400 level, or a starting sum of £2,200 indexed at 8.5 per cent pa. The advantage of life annuities over pension ones is that not all the income is taxed as income, a proportion is deemed to be return of capital.

I would also recommend some funds are held on deposit at a bank or building society. Bristol and West's postal account would offer 7.55 per cent.

A popular lower-risk investment is the with-profit insurance bond, which is in effect a single premium investment policy designed to provide a predictable investment return over a period of time. While these are insurance products and do usually provide increased death benefits to the underlying investment value, they are not designed to provide family protection in the event of death. Typically, the policy will pay 101 per cent of the value of the investment at death and technically, as an insurance policy, it enjoys special tax treatment.

Where this type of investment offers more security is that each year a bonus rate is announced in advance and will be payable on the amount of the investment. That bonus will be paid regardless of whether investment returns justify that level of return. This year's bonus rates look to be between 6 and 7 per cent. An

investment may only attract annual bonuses of 7 per cent pa but may also benefit from 2 to 3 per cent pa in terminal bonuses.

There is no immediate personal tax liability on withdrawals of up to 5 per cent pa for the first 20 years of the bond, for the first 20 years of the bond, for the first 20 years of the bond, for the first 20 years of the bond.

Joan's concern is that as she becomes older she may need substantial care, maybe in a home. Residential care can cost anything between £10,000 to £20,000 pa and the average stay is around three years. These costs already exceed the level of income that Joan's pensions and investments could generate, which could lead to rapid erosion of savings, or the value of her house which she has spent her life working to purchase.

Since 1990, local authorities have been legally obliged to recover the cost of care. Most income is taken into account in that assessment, including pensions but, regardless of income, capital assets exceeding £16,000 may make the individual responsible for paying for the standard fees of residential care.

While our main consideration must be income for Joan, it may be prudent to incorporate some provision for care. The life insurance company Lincoln has devised a more practical solution with their Independence Bond, due to come on the market shortly. This is in effect an investment vehicle, but can incorporate a level of benefits higher than the amount invested. These benefits will be paid out if the individual is unable to undertake certain activities of daily living, terminal illness and death. The cost of that insurance is taken from the investment fund on a monthly costed basis.

This may sound expensive, but, in reality, is not if the mechanics are understood. For an investment of £25,000, and a protection level of £50,000, the potential risk to the life company is only £25,000 at outset. In the early years the investor has the security of knowing that a move to residential care may not erode other assets.

Where Lincoln score with this product is that it carries an investment management charge of 0.25 per cent pa as opposed to the more normal 1 per cent pa industry average. It allows penalty-free withdrawals at any time, should the necessity arise, but the capital growth would be better utilised at a later date.

In conclusion, I would suggest a portfolio consisting of retention of existing "emergency" deposit holdings; a £50,000 with-profit bond with 5 per cent pa regular income deducted; £25,000 invested with Lincoln's Independence Bond with £50,000 worth of disability, terminal illness and death cover and £10,000 deposited with the Bristol and West postal account.

Assuming current interest rates, inflation and tax allowances in the 1998/99 tax year, I estimate that Joan's net income could amount to £8,768 pa, not too far away from her pre-retirement income. By only drawing 5 per cent income from the with-profit bond and none from Lincoln bond both should benefit from capital growth to insure that greater income will be available in the future.

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COLLECT TO INVEST: JOHN WINDSOR

Silver spoons regain their sparkle

Christie's expectation of £100,000-£150,000 for a famous set of 12 silver 17th century apostle spoons next month is a reminder that prices for collectable wrought silver – and apostle spoons in particular – are showing a sharp rise. Although the silver market remained stable during the recession, it has been dull for a decade.

Dating from the 15th century, apostle spoons, with cast and chased terminals representing saints, have risen in value at auction by some 50 per cent in the past couple of years. You can still buy 17th century apostles with unscrubbed maker's marks for under £500 – if you are lucky – but those whose makers are known have been selling for three and four times estimate.

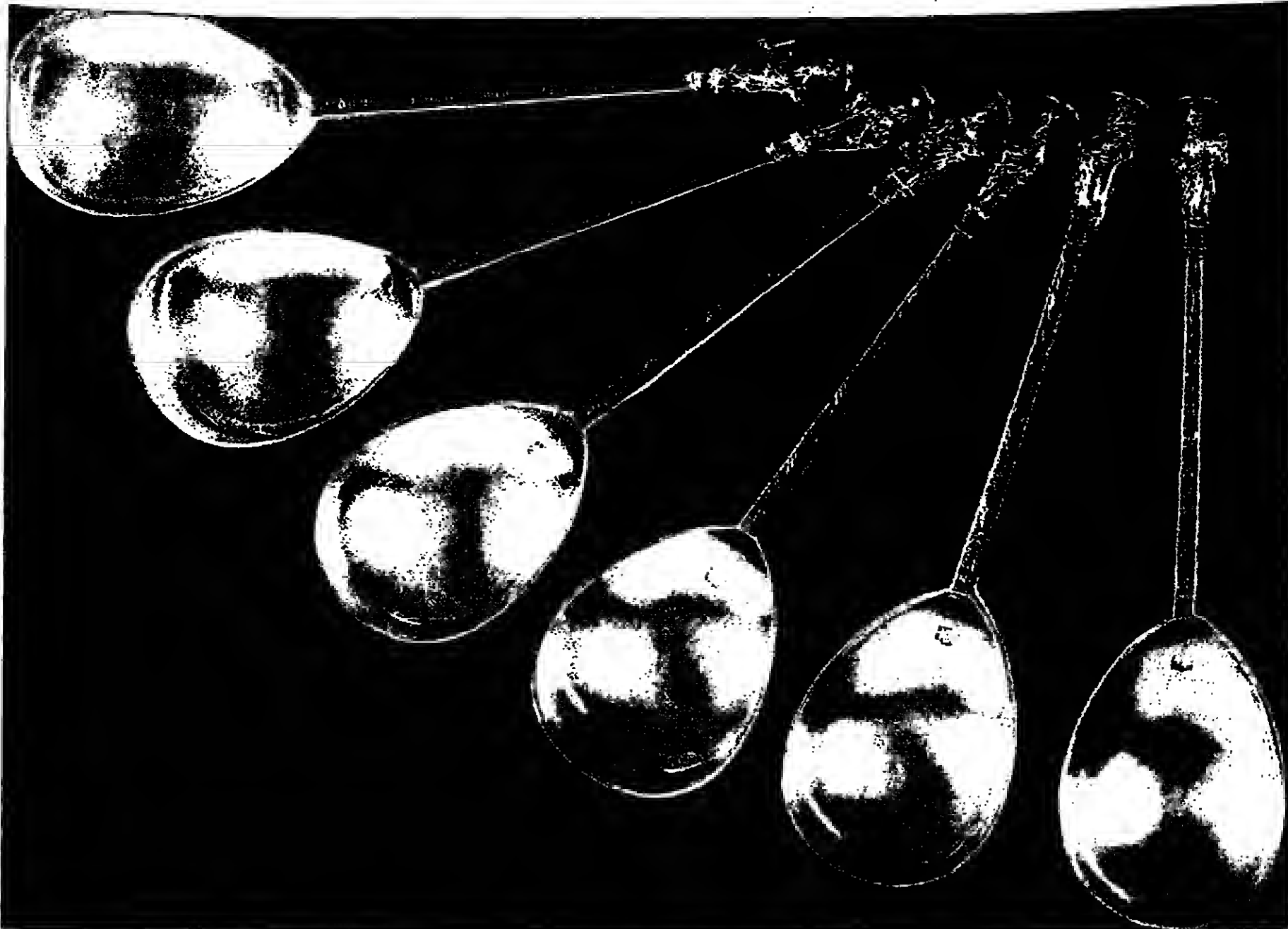
For example, at Sotheby's last July, an English provincial silver-gilt apostle spoon with an unscrubbed mark of about 1655 sold for a modest £368, towards the low end of its £350-£450 estimate. But in the same sale, a St Bartholomew spoon of 1636 with the mark of Robert Tyle of Salisbury made £1,955, four times the £400-£600 estimate.

The reason why an unscrubbed spoon of 1550, estimated £600-£800, fetched a whopping £2,185, was probably because the buyer had had more time to discover a name for the unscrubbed WC and star mark than the auctioneers.

For a variety of reasons, well-heeled new buyers are entering the apostle spoon market. They are middle aged and retired lawyers, bankers and accountants – not only British but Americans and Australians – with time to read the growing number of textbooks that have made spoon-buying less of a lottery.

A Henry VIII St Matthias spoon, estimated £5,000-£8,000 at David Lay's auction house in Penzance three years ago, would have fetched nowhere near the £18,700 that was paid for it if Timothy Kent, a retired barrister and leading spoon expert, had not identified and published its fringed S mark as belonging to William Simpson, apprenticed to the London maker Robert Preston in 1499.

Simpson was one of the finest and most prolific makers of the first half of the 16th century. Kent's book on the spoon makers of the West Country – where many apostle spoons come from – has had a



A seller's market: Prices for apostle spoons have risen by 50 per cent since forgeries which flooded the market in the 1980s have been eradicated

Photograph: Sotheby's

steadily growing impact on the market since its publication in 1992.

Although prices for apostle spoons will probably continue to rise for a year or two, it is safest to consider this as a seller's market. The high prices are not being paid by speculators hoping for a quick profit, or by interior designers (seven-inch spoons can hardly be said to live up to a room) but by discerning collectors

who want that spoon even if they have to pay through the nose.

If they pause to think of investment, they might consider, wisely, returning their rarest purchases to auction in 10 years' time. By then, today's new collectors will have had their fill of run-of-the-mill pieces and will be competing even more fiercely for top-of-the-market gems.

Such maturation of the market

is already evident. A 1490 spoon depicting St James the Greater, from the earliest recorded set of hallmarked apostle spoons, fetched £22,000 at Phillips in October 1990 and £32,200 at Christie's in July 1993 – a gain of £10,200 in less than three years. If you really want to invest, you must dig deep to buy the very best.

The rarities being cashed in at

Sotheby's on 5 March are the 12 apostle spoons of the Swaythling Collection, reputedly presented by Charles II to Martha Clayton, wife of Sir Robert Clayton, Lord Mayor of London. Six date from 1524 and six from 1553. Complete 16th century sets are exceptionally rare. The Swaythling group is probably the finest of only two such sets still in private hands.

There are reasons other than improved documentation to feel confidence in apostle spoons. They are cheaper, and available in larger, more collectable numbers, than any other 16th or early 17th century objects. And they have lasting charm as cherished possessions from the days when cutlery was scarce (ordinary people carried their own spoons) and when families knew the

saints' names and prayed together before meals. They were sometimes given as christening presents.

The current surge is, in part, a response to the all-clear following the flooding of the spoon market in the early Eighties by the forger Martin Russell. Almost all of his expert work has now been eradicated.

While fear of spoon forgeries lasted, other silver collectables such as tea caddies, wine labels and Vesta boxes increased steadily in price. Fine examples of each sell for around £2,000. An eagle's wing tea caddy of 1830 that would have been worth £1,200-£1,500 two years ago sold for £3,800 at Phillips in January.

By comparison, apostle spoons are two or three centuries older, at least as fascinating, and, until recently, less expensive. Their current rise in value can be interpreted as the filling of the price vacuum artificially created by the forgeries. So drawers of escalating price graphs should not be over-optimistic.

As for the current heavy speculation in bullion silver by the "Sage of Omaha", Warren Buffett – bullion prices have little or no effect on wrought silver prices. Even at £4 an ounce, silver content is only a tiny proportion of total value. But it's comforting for collectors to know that someone is taking an interest.

Besides hiding at auction, consider visiting the country's leading spoon dealers, JH Bourdon-Smith, where the author of the standard guides on spoons, Mr Kent, can be consulted. The firm makes a point of selling nothing that it would not buy back. There is also a silver spoon collectors' club.

The next auction at Phillips, who are good on spoons, is 15 April, 12 noon.

Two standard guides by Tim Kent, available from JH Bourdon-Smith, 24 Mason's Yard, Duke Street, London SW1Y 6BL: "London Silver Spoon Makers, 1500-1697" (published by the Silver Society) 1981, £8 + p&p £1 inland, £2 abroad. "West Country Silver Spoons and Their Makers", 1550-1750 (published by Bourdon-Smith), 1992, £35 + p&p £3 inland, £7 abroad.

An annual subscription for the Spoon Collectors Club costs £29.50 and includes its bi-monthly journal "The Final". Contact Terry and Mary Haines, Glenleigh Park, Sticker, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 7JD (01726 65269).

Barclaycard grants a new lifeline to students.

The National Union of Students (NUS) has just clinched a deal giving its official seal of approval to Student Barclaycards, the junior version of the UK's first – and still its leading – credit card, in return for a donation of £1 a head to the union's funds. The deal is worth a cool £220,000 a year to the national union and to local student unions.

NUS national president Douglas Trainer insists that Student Barclaycards are consumer friendly because holders are limited to £350 worth of credit and there is no real risk of financial novices being lured into a lifetime of debt. No annual fees are charged for the cards and students who now take out a card will qualify for free gifts or cash bonuses.

For many students, the Student Barclaycard is a lifeline. Only 32 per cent of the 1.7 million full-time students in the UK have a credit or debit card, but this is almost entirely due to the fact that a student living on a grant alone is unlikely to qualify for a conventional credit card

from one of the existing credit card companies.

The qualifications for a Student Barclaycard with its lower monthly spending limit are much easier to meet, and 45 per cent of the 550,000 full-time students who use plastic to eke out their poverty-stricken existence have Student Barclaycards.

This fine for students who stay in credit, because they can enjoy interest-free credit if they pay off their bills every month before the payment date.

But, let's face it, how many students can afford to pay their credit-card debts off in full each month when they only get their grants three times a year? On unpaid balances each month, new Student Barclaycardholders taking advantage of the absence of an annual fee will pay 1.515 per cent a month, equal to 19.7 per cent a year, and existing customers pay 1.65 per cent a month, equal to 21.7 per cent over a full year – and well ahead of the cheaper card companies like MBNA or RBS Advanta.

Clifford German

LOOSE CHANGE

Premier Select is offering readers a free calculation of their future pension benefits. It is available to readers with or considering a personal pension and includes all current and previous pensions, state, company or personal. Call 0990 834834. Standard Life Bank has

raised the interest paid on its deposit accounts to 6.96 per cent on balances up to £2,500 and 7.26 per cent on larger balances.

Britannia is reducing the interest on its five-year fixed-rate mortgage offer to 5.99 per cent on up to 75 per cent of value, and 6.39 per cent on up to 90 per cent.

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BRIAN TORÁ

Some assurance for US bulls

It is that time of the month when the Government starts throwing statistics at us so we can gauge the state of the economy. There are those who consider we take our own temperature too often, but regular statistics do at least demonstrate a trend. And there are two worrying trends here in the UK at present: rising wage settlements and consumer spending.

In a way, we should not be too surprised over the trend in wage settlements. Even if the Government has not loosened the reins since it took power, there is the perception that things have changed and years of difficult wage negotiating, in which employers have been backed by a parsimonious administration, have come to an end.

Moreover, the economy is buoyant. With senior managers and company directors benefiting, why should workers not have a slice of this particular cake too? But it has worried enough of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to ensure a split vote over holding down interest rates.

The funny thing is that in the US, where unemployment is even lower than here, wage settlements remain subdued. Perhaps the workers there are all too aware of the threat the wounded Asian tigers could present. And interest rates continue to fall in America. Another threat could be over the horizon, though. Or is it an opportunity?

The relative buoyancy of retail sales here is a recent phenomenon. Up until less than a year ago people were still reluctant to spend, despite a strong economy. Then came the windfalls, delivering an estimated £30bn to Middle England, as building societies and life companies demutualised.

In America, of course, everything is always bigger. So it is with personal finance. It seems the American life assurance industry is poised to restructure in a move that will deliver billions of dollars of shares to as wide a range of recipients as benefited in the UK.

Prudential of America has already announced the intention to start the ball rolling. If listed in New York, Prudential is likely to be the tenth-largest company, with a market capitalisation extending into hundreds of billions of dollars. Makes even Halifax look small beer.

And this could be only the beginning. Metropolitan Life, the second-biggest life insurer - with assets above \$170bn, is likely to follow suit. Prospects look exciting.

All this will take a couple of years but it heralds a restructuring of the US life assurance industry every bit as dramatic as what happened here.

The wealth that it will thrust into the hands of Americans does not bear thinking about. It could trigger a spending boom. But then again, it should help support the stock market. Given the way personal savings have boomed over the past decade in the US, this could add to the wealth locked away for the future. Maybe those long-term bulls of American shares have got it right.

Brian Torá is chairman of Greig Middleton Investment Strategy Committee.

BEST BORROWING RATES

	Telephone	% Rate and period	Max adv %	Fee	Incentive
MORTGAGES					
FIXED RATES					
West Bromwich BS	0121 525 7070	5.75% to 11.00%	75%	£250	£500 cash rebate
Lloyds & Halifax BS	0800 225777	5.80% to 11.00%	75%	£250	-
Barclays Bank	0845 605 0500	6.25% to 11.00%	90%	£250	No MRP for adv up to 85%
VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES					
Hiscox & Hayley BS	0800 774499	0.95% for 1 year	85%	£250	Free Value & no MRP
Prudential BS	0800 000000	4.05% to 11.00%	85%	£250	-
Barclays Bank	0845 605 0500	4.00% to 11.00%	75%	£250	£500 rebate, reduced rate
FIRST TIME BUYERS FIXED RATES					
Barclays Bank	0845 605 0500	4.40% to 11.00%	90%	£250	No MRP for adv up to 85%
Prudential BS	01902 302000	5.75% to 11.00%	85%	£250	-
Barclays Bank	0800 123149	6.45% for 5 years	90%	£250	-
FIRST TIME BUYERS VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES					
Woolwich	0845 757675	5.70% for 1 year	90%	£150	2.5% of advance rebated
Prudential BS	0800 000000	5.05% to 11.00%	90%	£250	-
Natwest BS	0800 302010	6.75% for 5 years	90%	£250	Rebated of rate fee
UNSECURED PERSONAL LOANS					
	Telephone	APR %	Fixed monthly payments on £5K over 3 yrs		
UNSECURED					
Barclays Bank	0845 421401	9.9% H	£165.10		£165.11
Direct Line	0181 680 9099	12.9% A	£165.75		£165.38
BSB Direct	0800 121121	12.9%	£165.10		£165.30
SECURED LOANS (SECOND CHARGE)					
	Telephone	APR	Max LTV Advance	Term	
Clydesdale Bank	0800 240024	6.7%	£25K to £15K	5 years to 25 years	
First Direct	0800 121121	10.7%	£25K to £100K	3 years to 10 years	
First Direct	0845 100103	11.2%	£25K to 100%	Up to 40 years	
OVERDRAFTS					
	Telephone	Account	Authorised % per APR	Unauthorised % per APR	
Alliance & Leicester	0800 555555	Alliance	0.75%	9.5%	2.25%
Bank of Scotland	0800 848804	Direct cheque	-	11.0%	25.9%
Natwest BS	0800 302010	Flexiaccount	0.75%	12.2%	2.10%
CREDIT CARDS					
	Telephone	Credit Type	Rate % per APR %	Annual fee, fixed income	per APR
Capital One Bank	0800 660000	Visa	0.55% to 6.50%	Nil	54 days
BSB Advance	0800 077770	Visa	0.65% to 7.50%	Nil	58 days
Robert Fleming/BSP	0800 028100	Barclaycard Gold/MV	1.02% to 13.02%	Nil	0 days
GOLD CARDS					
Capital One Bank	0800 660000	Visa	0.55% to 6.50%	Nil	54 days £50K
Co-operative Bank	0345 212121	Barclaycard Visa	0.60% to 11.50%	£120	46 days £20K
BSB Advance	0800 077770	Visa	0.65% to 7.50%	Nil	56 days £20K
STORE CARDS					
	Telephone	Payment by direct debit	Payment by other methods		
		% PM	% APR	% PM	APR
John Lewis	Visa store	1.20%	18.0%	1.30%	18.0%
Deans	Visa store	1.94%	25.9%	2.20%	25.8%
Marks & Spencer	01244 681681	1.97%	26.3%	2.07%	27.8%

A - Minimum age 22 yrs. Holders of comprehensive motor insurance policy or lender's leading customer
APR - Annualised percentage rate
ASU - Accident, sickness and unemployment insurance
B+C - Buildings and contents insurance
H - Higher rate applies if insurance not arranged
LTV - Loan to value
MP - Mortgage indemnity premium
N - Interest rate for a fixed period
U - Unemployment insurance

All rates subject to change without notice. Source: MONEYFACTS 01682 500677 19 February 1998

BEST SAVINGS RATES

Telephone number	Account	Notice or term	Deposit	Rate %	Interest interval
INSTANT ACCESS					
Clydesdale Bank	0800 442255	Savings	Instant	£1	6.75% Day
Stroud & Seddon BS	0845 413853	Branch Instant	Instant	£100	6.00% Year
Natwest Bank	0800 505000	Branch Select Instant	Instant	£1,000	6.85% Year
Lloyds & Halifax BS	0800 225777	Premium Access	Instant	£5,000	7.00% Year
INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS					
Natwest BS	0800 302010	InstantDirect	Postal	£1	6.80% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0845 413853	Direct Access	Instant (7)	£1	6.90% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 505000	Direct Savings	Instant (1)	£1,000	7.30% Year
Alliance & Leicester	0845 605 0500	First Class Instant	Postal	£10,000	7.50% Year
NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS					
Stroud & Seddon BS	01723 300016	Goodborough 30	30 Day	£1,000	7.80% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 225777	Postal 30	30 Day (7)	£1	7.50% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0181 680 9099	Monday By Mail 90	90 Day (7)	£25,000	8.10% Year
Birmingham Midshires	0845 720721	First Class 120	120 Day (7)	£10,000	7.25% Year
CHEQUE ACCOUNTS					
Stroud & Seddon BS	0171 603 1600	NCA 5000	Instant	£5,000	6.45% Month
Stroud & Seddon BS	01422 352023	Asset Reserve	Instant	£10,000	7.50% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 429429	Classic Postal	Instant	£10,000	7.50% Year
Lloyds & Halifax BS	0171 528 2323	Instant Access	Instant	£25,000	6.70% Year
FIXED RATE BONDS					
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 202121	Fix for Six	6 Month	£5,000	7.80% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 307090	Branch Fixed Rate Bond 1	1 Year	£500	7.50% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0171 687 6150	Fixed Rate Bond	1 Year	£25,000	7.80% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0845 685322	Fixed Option Bond 4	1 Year	£1,000	7.50% F Year
FIRST TESSAS					
Lloyds & Halifax BS	0800 302010	Postal TESSA	5 Year	£1,000	7.95% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01246 202055	Branch TESSA	5 Year	£1,000	7.95% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 781 7386	Branch TESSA	5 Year	£1,000	7.95% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 378535	Branch TESSA	5 Year	£1,000	7.95% Year
FOLLOW-ON TESSAS					
Stroud & Seddon BS	01422 352023	TESSA 2 Plus	5 Year	£1,000	8.05% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 225777	TESSA 2 Plus	5 Year	£1,000	8.00% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 225777	TESSA 2 Plus	5 Year	£1,000	8.00% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 225777	TESSA 2 Plus	5 Year	£1,000	8.00% Year
GUARANTEED INCOME BONDS (net)					
Stroud & Seddon BS	0181 330 3388	GE Financial Assurance	1 Year	£10,000	6.30% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0181 330 3388	AGL Ltd (UK)	2 Year	£10,000	5.85% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0181 330 3388	AGL Ltd (UK)	3 Year	£10,000	5.70% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0181 330 3388	AGL Ltd (UK)	4 Year	£10,000	6.45% F Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	0800 638020	Hambro Assurance	5 Year	£10,000	5.40% F Year
OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS (gross)					
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 726886	Instant Offshore	Instant	£10,000	7.00% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01178 007072	Instant Offshore	Instant	£25,000	7.30% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 718121	Offshore 60	60 Day	£10,000	7.65% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01624 681100	90 Day Notice	90 Day	£10,000	7.85% Year
NATIONAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (gross)					
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 726886	Instant Offshore	Instant	£10,000	7.00% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01178 007072	Instant Offshore	Instant	£25,000	7.30% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 718121	Offshore 60	60 Day	£10,000	7.65% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01624 681100	90 Day Notice	90 Day	£10,000	7.85% Year
INCENTIVE BONDS					
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 726886	Instant Offshore	Instant	£10,000	7.00% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01178 007072	Instant Offshore	Instant	£25,000	7.30% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 718121	Offshore 60	60 Day	£10,000	7.65% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01624 681100	90 Day Notice	90 Day	£10,000	7.85% Year
PRUDENTIAL GUARANTEED INCOME BOND SERIES 4					
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 726886	Instant Offshore	Instant	£10,000	7.00% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01178 007072	Instant Offshore	Instant	£25,000	7.30% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01481 718121	Offshore 60	60 Day	£10,000	7.65% Year
Stroud & Seddon BS	01624 681100	90 Day Notice	90 Day	£10,000	7.85% Year

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How to read between the lines of annual reports

Investors often regard all company mail save their dividend cheques as junk. But studying a firm's annual report and accounts can pay off. John Andrew explains what to look out for.

One joke doing the rounds of the accountancy profession in the early 1970s was that a company had explored cutting postage costs by sending the shareholders' dividend cheques out with the annual report and accounts. Their research revealed that most shareholders threw the report and accounts away unread and the cheques would be thrown

away with them, and the project was abandoned.

Since then companies have made great efforts to improve the quality and readability of their messages to shareholders, and with good reason. "Reports and accounts are vital in assessing the performance and financial position of a company in which you might have current or future interest," says Gill Nott, chief executive of ProShare.

Companies are obliged by law to report regularly to shareholders. It is a means by which those with a financial interest in the enterprise can judge how well or badly the business is doing. The main report and accounts are published annually following the end of the company's financial year.

They are considered an important communication as it is the main way that a company has of explaining its business to the outside world, so it is not surprising that most companies

nowadays take considerable time and effort in producing the document.

Generally, they are glossy publications which contain photographs and colourful diagrams detailing the business's progress. Naturally they also contain reams of figures. However, they typically begin with narrative statements which provide a commentary on the business and financial performance of the company.

The opening section is usually the chairman's statement, which gives an overall view of what has happened over the past year, as well as some comments on the future prospects of the company.

The next narrative statement is normally the chief executive's report. This provides a detailed commentary of the performance of each part of the enterprise as well as information affecting the company as a whole. In some reports this section is called the "operating and financial review".

Normally, the directors' report follows. This contains data which has to be disclosed by law. It includes details of any charitable or political donations the company may have made as well as giving the names of the directors and their personal shareholdings.

Of course, the most important element of the report and accounts is the financial information. If you find pages of figures daunting, follow Gill Nott's advice: "At least take time to read the chairman's and chief executive's statements, which will give you a feel for future prospects. It is optimistic, or is there a note of caution there?"

Although the financial information may look complicated, it is relatively easy to become familiar with the columns of figures. Ease yourself in by taking a look at the financial summary. This gives the financial highlights for at least the past two and sometimes up to five years. It is there

fore possible - at a glance - to see the trend for profits as well as earnings, dividends and net asset value per share.

The two key financial statements are the balance sheet and the profit and loss account. The balance sheet is a snapshot of the company's situation at the end of its trading year. It shows what the organisation owns - its assets - and what it owes - its liabilities.

Most companies traded on the stock market control a number of subsidiary companies. They therefore prepare a consolidated balance sheet showing the assets and liabilities of all the businesses combined, as well as a balance sheet for the parent company.

The profit and loss account shows how much profit the company has made. It shows the turnover, which is the total sum of goods or services sold during the trading year, and the company's expenses.

If income exceeds costs the company should show a rising trend. **Dividends:** Many investors prefer companies which pay a steadily rising dividend. Comparing earnings per share to dividends per share over a period will reveal the company's dividend policy.

It is essential to read the notes to the accounts as these often have important information tucked away. Although report and accounts are important, you must always remember that their contents are historic. You must keep up to date through newspapers and magazines with companies' news.

Here are some points to look out for.

Cash flow: It is vital that there is a strong cash flow as it demonstrates that the earnings are real and it helps fund the company's expansion.

Turnover: This is another key indicator. If turnover is up profits and earnings per share should be too.

Pre-tax profits: If a business is

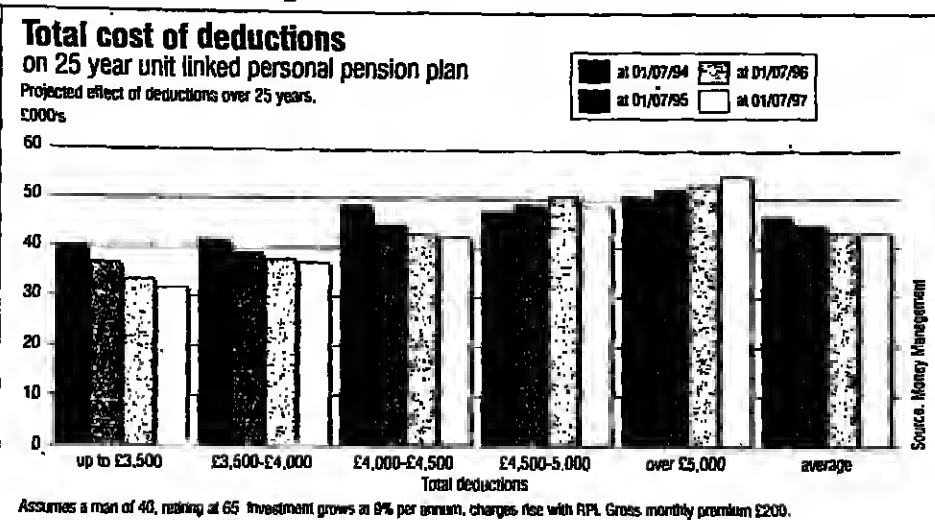
doing well profits and turnover should show a rising trend.

Introduction to Annual Reports & Accounts: A simple guide with a step-by-step approach to interpreting the information. It is published by ProShare at £4.95 including p&p. Orders to ProShare (UK) Ltd, Library Chambers, 13-14 Basinghall Street, London EC2V 5BQ.

Check the cost of your investments



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Two things can be said with certainty about the current state of the retail financial services business. One is that consumers are sensibly beginning to take a much greater interest in planning their own financial welfare. The pensions selling scandal has brought home that nobody has an excuse any more for not taking greater care of their own finances. The State is no longer offering to do the job, and the industry - left to its own devices - has failed miserably to demonstrate that it is in the business of putting consumer interests first at all times.

The second thing that can be said is that there are also clear and positive signs of improvement. As consumers become more aware, and as past barriers to effective competition have started to come down, there is no mistaking the pressure for reform which greater competition is creating in the design and selling of retail financial products.

Both the insurance and banking sectors have undergone sweeping changes in the last few years, many for the better, and specialist providers such as unit trust and investment trust companies are also slowly starting to adapt to a more competitive environment.

Disclosure is proving to be a key element in the process of empowering consumers. Without clear and transparent information about the nature and cost of different financial prod-

ucts, whether they are pensions, mortgages or unit trusts, the transition towards a genuinely service-oriented business will continue to drag.

That is why the last government was right to insist on greater disclosure of information about product costs. It is now three years since the introduction of new statutory rules forcing insurance companies to disclose the full costs of different 'life insurance' and pensions plans. Nine months ago the same rules were applied to unit trusts, investment trusts and personal equity plans (PEPs). The Personal Investment Authority's latest annual reports on the effect of the disclosure rules throw some interesting light on the pace of change that has taken place.

Anyone who can be bothered to go to the library and ask for the reports will be able to see how his own policies or savings schemes compare in cost with those of all the other main providers. Of course, cost is not the only issue in picking a savings provider: some of the companies with the best performance track records naturally try to extract a price for their superior investment performance. But what the figures do allow you to do is to see exactly how much additional return you need to obtain from a higher cost savings scheme or pension to compensate for the extra amount you are paying.

A fund management com-

pany with a particularly good track record as an active investor may do better than an index-tracking fund, to take one obvious example, but if it costs, say, the equivalent of 1.5 per cent a year more each year (as some do), then the final sum you end up with may well be cancelled out in the higher costs.

The overall story from the life and pensions business is one of steady, modest progress. As the graphic shows, the overall proportions of a typical 10 or 25-year pension or endowment policy that are eaten up by commission, charges and other costs has fallen over three years, although the rate of improvement slowed in 1997.

The range of costs between the best and worst provider is still quite large: for a 20 year unit-linked pension, for example, it ranges from 0.8 per cent a year in lost return (Equitable Life, the cheapest) to three times that amount for the most expensive.

It is probably no accident that one area where disclosure is not yet required - which is in showing the effect that stopping premiums on a life insurance savings scheme has on maturity and transfer values - is also one where the impact of costs and charges has, on average, remained much higher. The PIA sensibly intends to extend its rules to this area from now on.

Just as interesting are the comparisons between insurance

company products and unit and investment trusts. For regular savings schemes, the surprise is how similar in cost unit trusts and insurance company products seem to be, once you have allowed for the value of the life cover you tend to get with the latter. For lump sums, the average unit trust scheme is actually more expensive than the equivalent life product.

On all types of savings scheme, however, investment trusts are appreciably less expensive than either of the other two. That is no doubt the price investment trusts have to pay for being more volatile and less easy to understand than unit trusts. But, in periods of high discounts, as now, they remain the vehicle of choice for the more sophisticated investor.

Take note, however, that the range of costs in the unit trust and investment trust sectors is wider than it is in life insurance - there are some very expensive trusts out there, even though the average cost may be lower. If the experience with life products is any guide, the effect of disclosure should be to narrow the range.

You only have to look at experience in the United States - where mutual funds are materially cheaper on average than their equivalent here - to know that we have some way to go before we can declare that the consumer is yet king in this business. But at least we are moving in the right direction.

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Shops and banks are working against the clock to ensure tills don't reject credit cards because of the Millennium. Paul Slade reports.

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Barclays Bank, the first card issuer to start giving customers cards with a year 2000 expiry date, says the new cards are failing at the rate of one a day.

The problem arises when retailer systems fail to recognise the cards as valid. Like other computer systems, they were originally programmed to read only the final two digits of any given year, and crash when confronted with a reading of "00".

Visa and Mastercard's embargo on producing cards expiring in the year 2000 ended on 1 October last year. Barclays started producing 00 cards immediately, and now has over 1 million in use. The bank has so far had about 350 complaints from cardholders who have had their 00 cards rejected in shops and other outlets round the world, including 30 complaints in January.

Most other card issuers are also distributing 00 cards now, although none started as soon as Barclays. About four in 10 of the Barclays complaints arose in October. "Systems are becoming more compliant as time goes on," says the bank's Kirsty Robbie.

The high street banks also supply their own credit card terminals to retailers, and have been busy updating those terminals to cope with the millennium bug for the past few years. Now, they say, all but a tiny handful of systems should be able to accept 00 cards with no problem.

But American Express is refusing to start producing its own 00 cards yet because it fears retail outlets worldwide will not be ready to accept them.



Credit squeeze: Cards with expiry dates past the year 2000 are being rejected at some shop tills

Atalia DaSilva of American Express says: "I'm sure we'll issue year 2000 cards this year, but I don't know when. We want to make sure the merchants are ready to accept them in their point of sale devices. When a merchant's system rejects a card, it doesn't say why. It just rejects it. We want to avoid that happening."

Abbey National will not start issuing 00 cards till June this year, when its own systems testing is complete and it can be

"completely confident" cards will not be rejected at point of sale. This has meant cutting the lifetime of its own cards to just 18 months - an expensive move for the bank.

NatWest started producing 00 credit cards about a month ago, and has since issued some 400,000, with no complaints so far. The bank has also been responsible for modifying the 170,000 terminals it has in shops and other retail outlets.

Last month two cases came

to light where NatWest's modification of its terminals had failed. Both happened in Ikea branches, where customers' 00 cards were rejected, forcing staff to key in card details manually.

NatWest's Nick Gill says: "The upgrade had been put through for the year 2000, but there was a problem with the software. We realised that we'd need to write a new bit of software for it, because it was a bespoke terminal."

Mr Gill says the problem affected fewer than 100 of the terminals NatWest is responsible for, all of which have now been successfully dealt with. He says the bank is ahead of its rivals on year 2000 compliance.

Liz Phillips of the Credit Card Research Group says: "When you start issuing cards, you start finding the outlets where you're getting problems. It's often smaller retailers who've got a second-hand

terminal which may not have been made Millennium compliant. The good thing is that the system behind the terminals is working OK."

Gerard Long, manager of Midland's year 2000 programme says: "It's where the terminals are owned by the retailer that there's an issue. They should go to their systems supplier and ensure they get a compliant version. There's only a small number of those out there and they are being addressed."

Some believe there will be more problems for cardholders using their plastic overseas than for those in the UK. Erica Harper of Royal Bank of Scotland says: "I suppose the test will be when the holiday season arrives. Internationally, I think there's likely to be more problems. People have always been advised to take lots of ways of paying for things when they go away, but this year I think that will apply all the more."

Visa divides the world up into six regions, all of which it says are 99 per cent or 100 per cent 2000-compliant. Visa's Matthew Talbot says: "We don't see any particular problem even in the most far-flung places. In the smaller, more remote places, where Visa might be accepted, often you'll find a manual swipe machine, and no electronics at all."

If you should find your own 00 card rejected in a shop or restaurant, the owner should be able to phone whichever bank supplied his terminal to get authorisation, take a manual imprint of the card and put the transaction through while you wait.

Don't bank on the Net, yet

ROBIN AMLÖT
INTERNET
INVESTOR



By and large I have steered clear of getting into the technicalities of computers, modems, software and the paraphernalia which is involved in surfing the net for several reasons, not least because this is not a column about computers and I am by no means an expert on such matters.

Like most people I switch the kit on and expect it all to work as it should. Thus to be confronted by the following message was dispiriting: "Netscape's network connection was refused by the server. The server may not be accepting connections or may be busy. Try connecting again later."

This is software-speak for: "The number you have called does not know that you are waiting, nor does it care. Try again some time and have a nice day!"

So what? Well, I find it a matter of some concern to be confronted by such a message while investigating the options available for banking on the internet. It makes a mockery of the advantages one would rehearse for being able to bank via one's own computer in one's own time. It would be like turning up to the bank to pay money in or cash a cheque to see a notice on the door saying: "We're closed but we'll be open some time later. Come back then."

In fact, it happened to me last Sunday night, when one

might reasonably assume that the website in question would not be overly busy. In fairness, I should also report when I tried again the following morning I had no difficulty in getting on to the site. But that is not the point.

For web banking to take off it has got to be available to the customer and the potential customer when he, she, you or I want it. Not when it suits the bank to offer it.

If the reason I could not get on to the site was because it was too busy then the bank in question needs to expand its facilities. If the reason was because of some kind of computer failure then they need to improve the back-up systems. The institution in question? It was Royal Bank of Scotland's website.

Admittedly, electronic direct banking is in its infancy, at least in the UK. The first bank to offer online services was American. Wells Fargo Bank launched its online services in 1989 and internet banking in May 1995. It now has around 200,000 online accounts.

For financial institutions facing increasing competition from the likes of supermarket banking it is a logical step to become a "Martini" business - anytime, anywhere, anywhere.

It was only in June last year that the Royal Bank of Scotland's internet banking service went live, becoming the second big UK financial institution to offer banking on

the web, beaten by two months by the Nationwide Building Society, which launched its online service in May 1997.

So far, these two remain the only web-based accounts on offer from large British financial institutions. However, the other banks are not far behind. Several offer PC banking via their own "intranet" operations, while TSB runs an online service through the service provider Compuserve which Lloyds is building on to establish internet banking.

By January 1998, after six months in operation, Royal Bank of Scotland's service "direct banking by PC" had 10,000 customers. The bank had originally planned for the service to be free for each customer's first six months, after which a charge of £1.50 per month was to be made. However, the charge has now been withdrawn and the service is free.

Nationwide Building Society's recently redesigned Online Banking site was always designed to be fee-free and allows you to run a FlexAccount and access CashBuilder card and InvestDirect accounts online. I will be returning to the subject of just how these accounts operate and what you can and cannot do banking online in the future.

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16.2
UK

A no-shareholder pension? The benefits are mutual

A wise choice of personal pension can make a big difference to your income in retirement, and a mutual company may well offer the best deal, writes James Moore.

Looking to buy a personal pension? It is probably the most important financial commitment you can make – apart from a mortgage.

And, just as with mortgages, suggests evidence collected by the City watchdog the Personal Investment Authority (PIA), people get a better deal with mutual firms.

Mutuals have no shareholders, so have no need to pay dividends to them. Building societies are owned by their savers and borrowers; mutual insurers belong to their policyholders.

The theory is that, because they have no shareholders, mutual insurers should pay out more to policyholders than their equivalent, shareholder-owned proprietary companies when a pension policy matures.

When the PIA looked at the performance of personal pensions sold by mutual and proprietary companies, it found that on average, this was true.

There are two main types of pension fund available: with profits, and unit-linked.

With-profits policies are the traditional method of sharing out investment profits, with a bonus added to the basic benefits of the policy every year. Some money is held over in good years to pay out in bad years, which smooths out stock market ups and downs.

PIA figures show that the average estimated value of a 25-year pension plan into which £60 per month had been paid



Proof positive: In theory, mutuals, without shareholders to pay profits to, should pay out more to pension policyholders. In practice, recent figures from the City's watchdog show they do

is £50,228 for the 10 mutuals surveyed. The 18 proprietaries managed just £48,129 – 4.4 per cent less.

The figures are based on the PIA's assumption of 9 per cent growth each year. The difference comes in the charges levied by the companies.

Unit-linked policies are more variable and directly reflect the value of a pool of investments. Again, however, the figures, based on the same assumptions, show

mutuals out-perform proprietaries, providing an average payout of 1.9 per cent higher, with £49,562 compared with £48,629.

The PIA bluntly puts mutuals' unit-linked policies' better performance down to "either a higher expected degree of efficiency, or lower profit margins".

Unsurprisingly, the PIA's research has not been well received by the proprietary companies. John Bowman, a director at Commercial Union Life, points out that the competitive personal pension market pushes down charges and improves margins for investors.

"It is wrong to say that just because you are a mutual you will do better... and it is an over-simplification to look at mutuals and proprietaries like this. You have to look at companies on a case by case basis. We expect to compete with any mutual."

Norwich Union demutualised last year. Philip Scott, the group director of life and pensions, says: "Our fund is a mutual fund within Norwich Union, so there is no payout to shareholders from it. We make the money from charges. They don't all work like that. You have to look at individual companies."

But the mutuals say the figures confirm they are doing better. They may also make policyholders in mutual companies pause for thought before voting to convert in the hope of a payout, should the option be offered, as happened in the case of Nationwide Building Society when a proposal to demutualise put by rebel members was voted down.

"Proprietary companies have to pay part of their with-profits funds to shareholders. If mutuals are efficient and well run they should outperform them. We have no plans to list because we don't need to," says Tom King, group director at Standard Life.

But he does warn against automatically assuming that mutuals will be better: "It is not enough to be mutual. You have to be a well-run mutual company that has the capitalisation to invest in shares."

Nigel Webb, a senior manager at Equitable Life, which performed better than any other company in the PIA's survey, says: "We believe strongly that the benefits of a well-run mutual are very significant."

"If mutuals do run their business for the benefit of their members and focus on that, they have a very strong message to tell."

Whether mutual insurers will manage

to remain mutual, and provide the type of benefits of which the PIA found evidence, remains to be seen.

Like football chairmen saying they have every confidence in managers before sacking them, mutuals tend to insist that they are happy with their status until they announce their intention to convert.

Some believe that whatever they say, when the global insurance market becomes a reality and competition heats up, mutuals will have to convert to release the capital they need in order to compete and expand.

Charles Thompson, Scottish Widows' operations and appointed actuary, says: "There is quite a lot of evidence that suggests that mutuals have outperformed proprietaries. Scottish Widows has no plans to convert."

"But, as a personal view, whether mutuals will be able to stay mutual in a global market place – that remains to be seen."

Points for choosing a pension

Do Shop around. Compare the projected maturity values of different companies.

They, or an independent financial adviser, should be able to provide you with these. Look at their record – this does not guarantee future performance, but a good record long term is a reasonable indicator.

Take out a waiver of premium cover. This will pay your premiums if you are unable to work for a period of time, and is relatively inexpensive.

Pick a plan that suits your needs. If you feel your employment is relatively stable it may be better to choose a plan that has less flexibility but which will pay out more when you retire. If not, choose a plan that allows you to suspend premiums without penalties.

Go straight to your bank or building society, or a company you have used before for other products.

Necessarily go for the cheapest option. You may lose out on performance. Look for a good all-round package.

Take out a personal pension if you are in an occupational scheme. If you wish to increase your contributions, take out an additional voluntary contribution plan or use another savings vehicle.

MUTUAL VS PROPRIETARY

	Property	Mutual
Average illustrative maturity value		
Unit Linked	£48,629	£49,562
With Profits	£48,129	£50,228
Maximum illustrative maturity value		
Unit Linked	£52,200	£57,100
With Profits	£52,200	£57,100
Minimum illustrative maturity value		
Unit Linked	£43,400	£46,700
With Profits	£43,400	£46,700

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UK Equity Growth

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Alcoa	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100	2101	2102	2103	2104	2105	2106	2107	2108	2109	2110	2111	2112	2113	2114	2115	2116	2117	2118	2119	2120	2121	2122	2123	2124	2125	2126	2127	2128	2129	2130	2131	2132	2133	2134	2135	2136	2137	2138	2139	2140	2141	2142	2143	2144	2145	2146	2147	2148	2149	2150	2151	2152	2153	2154	2155	2156	2157	2158	2159	2160	2161	2162	2163	2164	2165	2166	2167	2168	2169	2170	2171	2172	2173	2174	2175	2176	2177	2178	2179	2180	2181	2182	2183	2184	2185	2186	2187	2188	2189	2190	2191	2192	2193	2194	2195	2196	2197	2198	2199	2200	2201	2202	2203	2204	2205	2206	2207	2208	2209	2210	2211	2212	2213	2214	2215	2216	2217	2218	2219	2220	2221	2222	2223	2224	2225	2226	2227	2228	2229	2230	2231	2232	2233	2234	2235	2236	2237	2238	2239	2240	2241	2242	2243	2244	2245	2246	2247	2248	2249	2250	2251	2252	2253	2254	2255	2256	2257	2258	2259	2260	2261	2262	2263	2264	2265	2266	2267	2268	2269	2270	2271	2272	2273	2274	2275	2276	2277	2278	2279	2280	2281	2282	2283	2284	2285	2286	2287	2288	2289	2290	2291	2292	2293	2294	2295	2296	2297	2298	2299	2300	2301	2302	2303	2304	2305	2306	2307	2308	2309	2310	2311	2312	2313	2314	2315	2316	2317	2318	2319	2320	2321	2322	2323	2324	2325	2326	2327	2328	2329	2330	2331	2332	2333	2334	2335	2336	2337	2338	2339	2340	2341	2342	2343	2344	2345	2346	2347	2348	2349	2350	2351	2352	2353	2354	2355	2356	2357	2358	2359	2360	2361	2362	2363	2364	2365	2366	2367	2368	2369	2370	2371	2372	2373	2374	2375	2376	2377	2378	2379	2380	2381	2382	2383	2384	2385	2386	2387	2388	2389	2390	2391	2392	2393	2394	2395	2396	2397	2398	2399	2400	2401	2402	2403	2404	2405	2406	2407	2408	2409	2410	2411	2412	2413	2414	2415	2416	2417	2418	2419	2420	2421	2422	2423	2424	2425	2426	2427	2428	2429	2430	2431	2432	2433	2434	2435	2436	2437	2438	2439	2440	2441	2442	2443	2444	2445	2446	2447	2448	2449	2450	2451	2452	2453	2454	2455	2456	2457	2458	2459	2460	2461	2462	2463	2464	2465	2466	2467	2468	2469	2470	2471	2472	2473	2474	2475	2476	2477	2478	2479	2480	2481	2482	2483	2484	2485	2486	2487	2488	2489	2490	2491	2492	2493	2494	2495	2496	2497	2498	2499	2500	2501	2502	2503	2504	2505	2506	2507	2508	2509	2510	2511	2512	2513	2514	2515	2516	2517	2518	2519	2520	2521	2522	2523	2524	2525	2526	2527	2528	2529	2530	2531	2532	2533	2534	2535	2536	2537	2538	2539	2540	2541	2542	2543	2544	2545	2546	2547	2548	2549	2550	2551	2552	2553	2554	2555	2556	2557	2558	2559	2560	2561	2562	2563	2564	2565	2566	2567	2568	2569	2570	2571	2572	2573	2574	2575	2576	2577	2578	2579	2580	2581	2582	2583	2584	2585	2586	2587	2588	2589	2590	2591	2592	2593	2594	2595	2596	2597	2598	2599	2600	2601	2602	2603	2604	2605	2606	2607	2608	2609	2610	2611	2612	2613	2614	2615	2616	2617	2618	2619	2620	2621	2622	2623	2624	2625	2626	2627	2628	2629	2630	2631	2632	2633	2634	2635	2636	2637	2638	2639	2640	2641	2642	2643	2644	2645	2646	2647	2648	2649	2650	2651	2652	2653	2654	2655	2656	2657	2658	2659	2660	2661	2662	2663	2664	2665	2666	2667	2668	2669	2670	2671	2672	2673	2674	2675	2676	2677	2678	2679	2680	2681	2682	2683	2684	2685	2686	2687	2688	2689	2690	2691	2692	2693	2694	2695	2696	2697	2698	2699	2700	2701	2702	2703	2704	2705	2706	2707	2708	2709	2710	2711	2712	2713	2714	2715	2716	2717	2718	2719	2720	2721	2722	2723	2724	2725	2726	2727	2728	2729	2730	2731	2732	2733	2734	2735	2736	2737	2738	2739	2740	2741	2742	2743	2744	2745	2746	2747	2748	2749	2750	2751	2752	2753	2754	2755	2756	2757	2758	2759	2760	2761	2762	2763	2764	2765	2766	2767	2768	2769	2770	2771	2772	2773	2774	2775	2776	2777	2778	2779	2780	2781	2782	2783	2784	2785	2786	2787	2788	2789	2790	2791	2792	2793	2794	2795	2796	2797	2798	2799	2800	2801	2802	2803	2804	2805	2806	2807	2808	2809	2810	2811	2812	2813	2814	2815	2816	2817	2818	2819	2820	2821	2822	2823	2824	2825	2826	2827	2828	2829	2830	2831	2832	2833	2834	2835	2836	2837	2838	2839	2840	2841	2842	2843	2844	2845	2846	2847	2848	2849	2850	2851	2852	2853	2854	2855	2856	2857	2858	2859	2860	2861	2862	2863	2864	2865	2866	2867	2868	2869	2870	2871	2872	2873	2874	2875	2876	2877	2878	2879	2880	2881	2882	2883	2884	2885	2886	2887	2888	2889	2890	2891	2892	2893	2894	2895	2896	2897	2898	2899	2900	2901	2902	2903	2904	2905	2906	2907	2908	2909	2910	2911	2912	2913	2914	2915	2916	2917	2918	2919	2920	2921	2922	2923	2924	2925	2926	2927	2928	2929	2930	2931	2932	2933	2934	2935	2936	2937	2938	2939	2940	2941	2942	2943	2944	2945	2946	2947	2948	2949	2950	2951	2952	2953	2954	2955	2956	2957	2958	2959	2960	2961	2962	2963	2964	2965	2966	2967	2968	2969	2970	2971	2972	2973	2974	2975	2976	2977	2978	2979	2980	2981	2982	2983	2984	2985	2986	2987	2988	2989	2990	2991	2992	2993	2994	2995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F&C Index	02
F&C Index	03
F&C Index	04

1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
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1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53</																																															

32	5000	15	256.80	122.88
31	500	45	140.10	119.07
30	1000	28	263.10	121.42

[illegible]

33	Bullitt-Gifford-Bullitt-Sm Cos	11/
33	1 Bullitt-Gifford-UK-Sm Cos	06/
37	1 Backus-Sm Cos	08/

[illegible]

957	500	11	68.82	101.22
957	1000	45	67.96	98.08

Aluminum	00000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000</
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89	ScotAmicableGlobalMgdUS	08
90	TempletonGlobalBal	09
2	TotalTempleCourt	

[illegible]

788	2000	3	232 16	101.36
	1000	1981		107.77

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26	2	Perpetual of Eastern	07
	3	Pilgrim Pacific	02
	4	Pacific of East	17

[illegible]

1000	53	320.90	98 89
500	13	138.00	71 67
1000	13	98.77	71 48

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9/MOTORING



Sweetest diesel of all

Where's the truth? When does fact melt into apocryphal? Follow a filthy taxi as it labours up a hill, and you'll be thankful for your car heater's air recirculation control, if it has one. If it doesn't, you'll hate diesels even more. You'll think of them as slow, smelly, noisy things, their owners selfish creatures concerned only with saving money, and blow the rest of us.

Even some quite new diesels, cars that are pleasant to drive and engender an almost evangelical applied logic among their owners, can prove surprisingly stinky to those stuck behind them in traffic. But there is hope for the diesel's social rehabilitation—or maybe just habilitation—so that it can take its place on equal terms with today's squeaky-clean petrol engines.

The current buzz-phrase is "common-rail direct injection", which refers to the way the fuel is supplied to and squirted into the engine with a precision hitherto unknown when such high injection pressures are involved. It's claimed to make diesels cleaner, quieter, more responsive, more petrol-engine-like and yet more economical. The Fiat Group is the first to put such an engine into production—so far, in a version of the new Alfa 156 that isn't coming to the UK; the Peugeot-Citroën Group follows later in the year. Others aren't far behind.

In the meantime, try this. The Audi A6 you see here has the most advanced diesel engine you can buy in Britain. It's a V6, for a start, which is currently unique among diesels. It has four valves per cylinder like a good modern petrol engine, it has direct injection and electronic management (to overcome a direct injection engine's usual percussive racket), and

Road test: John Simister drives the Audi A6 2.5 TDI

delivers a hefty 150bhp from its 2.5 litres. That's only 15bhp down from the 2.4-litre petrol V6 also offered in the A6 range, and at 229hp it's pulling ability exceeds even that of the grandest A6's 2.8-litre petrol engine. It has catalytic converter; it smells and smokes hardly at all; all it lacks, for now, is this common-rail stuff. Audi doesn't label this car a V6 on its tail, merely a 2.5 TDI, as it did the old-shape A6 with its five-cylinder engine. This modesty is excessive, because the engine delivers a whole new experience. Start it up, and it sounds at first like a miniaturised luxury coach; deep and six-cylindric, but still with an overlay of diesel

"cackle". Drive off, let it warm up; soon you'll be aware merely of a distant V6 buzz, deeper than in a petrol engine but still a creamy voice.

And that's the point. This diesel, unlike most, has a voice, a sound that connects with the brain's pleasure centres in a way a good petrol engine can. That, and the way the engine helps readily up to speed, together make this the most undiesellike diesel I have ever tried.

It does all the usual turbo-diesel things—puffs vigorously from low speeds, uses amazingly little fuel, encourages a low-revs, low-stress approach to driving—yet it also spins smoothly and speeds to petrol-like velocities. Like most diesels its

able engine-speed range is relatively narrow, but the monstrous torque makes possible very long-legged gear ratios. And there are six of them.

If all diesels could be as sweet and effortless as this, I could be a convert. One day they probably will be. For now, it's a good reason to buy an Audi A6, along with the futuristically sculptural good looks, the comfort, the inviting interior and the feeling of high-quality permanence. It's not perfect—the steering is too light at speed, the doors spring too violently into their held-open positions, the photochromic anti-dazzle rear-view mirror wipes out the detail of what's behind you at night—but it's thoroughly desirable. Here's a diesel with all the advantages and, apparently, without the snags, wrapped up in the best big saloon you can currently buy.



Specifications
Prices: £26,320, or £28,284 for SE version.
Engines: 2.49 cc V6, 24 valves, direct-injection turbo-diesel, 150bhp at 4,000rpm.
Transmission: five-speed gearbox, front-wheel drive.
Performance: top speed 135mph, 0-60 in 9.5sec, 36-41mpg.
Rivals
BMW 525tds: £26,200. Slightly slower and thirstier than Audi, sounds smooth but lacks Audi's eagerness.
Citroën XM 2.5TD Exclusive:

£28,555. Only four cylinders but colossal pulling power. Engagingly odd.
Mercedes-Benz E300D Classics: £28,040. Base-trim version of desirable diesel Benz, not to fast but will last for ever.
Vauxhall Omega 2.5TD Elite: £27,495. Plushiest and priciest of BMW diesel-powered Omegas.
A BMW is better.
Volvo 570 TDI CD: £27,775. Grandest diesel 570, uses old but tuneful Audi five-cylinder. Pleasant, but lacks German build quality.



GAVIN GREEN

Just as in the Eighties nobody admitted to voting Tory but everybody did, so we are now equally hypocritical about our cars. Most of us would love to use public transport, if only it were better/cheaper/cleaner/safer/not used by smelly psychotics/not managed by Richard Branson. Until such time, we'll stick with our cars, thank you.

A new survey done by Lex, the leasing company, highlights what a disingenuous bunch we are. Forty-five per cent of motorists said they'd love to use their cars less, if only public transport were better—up from 23 per cent in 1988. And yet, even if congestion got twice as bad, only 7 per cent of commuters said that if push came to shove they'd switch to public transport. For school runners and shoppers, the figure is even lower (4 and 5 per cent respectively). Yet these very same people demand better public transport, presumably so that other drivers can use it.

Personally, I'm not in the least surprised by drivers' reluctance to "go public", but I am somewhat perplexed at the reasons why they want to stay clear of rail and Routemasters. One reason, apparently, is that most drivers surveyed actually enjoyed "chores" journeys. Sixty-six per cent of the 1,287 motorists interviewed said they liked driving to work, and six out of ten drivers said they enjoyed school runs. If that's true, then there is surely no hope of prising people out of their cars.

Within a fortnight of that Lex survey, another one landed on my desk (how do these people ever have time to run a business?). This

one, however, proved rather more instructive. Whereas the great British motorist's views on motoring are inevitably skewed by social mores and the need to "say the right thing", you can't get away from plain facts and figures. And the Lex Vehicle Reliability Survey is a straight mechanical reliability report on the 88,048 vehicles in that company's vast fleet.

It could well be the most representative reliability survey of them all because, unlike the *Which?* and *Top Gear* JD Power surveys, forms are not filled out by moaning Minnies who self-select themselves to air their grievances. Equally, unlike the JD Power survey, dealer support cannot twist the results: it's just down to the car, in this case all L-to-R-registration vehicles.

There are a number of big surprises. First, cars are getting less reliable, just as manufacturers try to pretend otherwise. You now have a one-in-four chance of getting stranded during the year. Last year, you had a one-in-five chance.

Japanese cars built in Britain are much less reliable than Japanese cars built in Japan. This makes common sense to you or me, but it's certainly not what Nissan and Toyota have been propagating. Also, the second most reliable make of car in use in Britain is a Jaguar. I personally find this amazing, not least because a couple of years ago Jaguars were about as trustworthy as Bill Clinton's marriage vow. They are now more than four times as reliable as Fords, whose "best practice" reliability standards Jaguar has allegedly been copying.

The most reliable make of car is Mitsubishi, which is about the only Japanese maker who hasn't set up shop in Britain. Surely this is no coincidence. Citroën is the maker of the least reliable vehicles on British roads (although my father-in-law's five-year-old ZX has never let him down), followed by Alfa Romeo (no surprise). Third worst maker is Rover, whose alleged and much hyped reliability renaissance—first under Honda's guidance, now BMW's—has proved to be about as believable as the great British public's views on giving up motoring.

Burning the daylight oil

Thinking of buying a diesel? Use your calculator first, says Roger Bell, after a year with an oil burner

Are you doing your bit for the ozone layer? Join the club. I took the eco-friendly plunge a year ago. Goodbye Alfa Romeo, hello Peugeot 306D Turbo. I even persuaded myself I'd be better off. I already admired the 306, with its suspension that absorbs bumps as well as it handles corners. Gripes? Mine leaks (an inch of water in the footwell isn't funny). Otherwise, no serious complaints, so let's talk diesel.

The bad news is that most diesels cost more than comparable petrols, and many still need frequent oil/filter changes—every 6,000 miles for the Peugeot—which adds to the costs. The good news is that diesels like the 306 should hold their value better than petrol siblings.

You're on safer ground comparing fuel consumption. My 306 averages 47 mpg,

which squares with the official Euromix of 46.3. The comparable petrol 1.6 gives only 36.5 mpg, but as diesel is no cheaper than unleaded, the savings are modest.

What may trigger another diesel boom is the introduction of advanced direct-injection diesels. The latest car to get DI is Renault's Mégane. Parsimony gives diesels a range advantage: some will exceed 800 miles on a tankful.

All the majors are working on DI to improve economy, emissions and performance. But the usual, horsepower-based performance yardsticks—0-60mph and top speed—are poor guides to a diesel's verve. Seat's 58mpg Ibiza TDI will accelerate from 50 to 70 mph in top faster than an Aston Martin Vantage in the same gear. So will Rover's cracking 220 SDI. My 306 also impresses with mid-range zap. What offends me is the filthy black smoke it belches when I put my foot down.

Diesels are good on some emissions, eg CO₂, because they burn less fuel. But dated or badly tuned ones can be very dirty. On all-round merit, VW sets the standard for Peugeot's coming direct-injection motors. The new Golf's catalyst-cleaned 110 bhp 1.9 Turbo gives out no smoke, no diesel

smell and virtually no CO or HC emissions. Yet it does 120 mpg and 57.6 mpg. Beat that.

Although most diesels suffer from cold-start clatter, the good ones sound no worse than discreetly gruff when under way, and mine is happiest on a motorway.

I do occasionally rue the switch to diesel. Then I'll do a long run, and I'm at peace with the decision. Tempted? First do your sums. If low all-in costs are a priority, consider this: Parker's price guide says the eight cheapest cars to run over a three-year/30,000-mile period all run on petrol. Suzuki's Alto heads the list.

Diesel pros...

More economical than petrol. Extends range between fill-ups. No ignition system to go wrong. Good ones hold value well. Good acceleration from turbos. Unfussy motorway cruising. CO₂ reduced.

...and cons

More expensive to buy. Need servicing more often. Non-turbos sluggish. Fuel messy and smelly. Rough, clattery idling. Less refinement than petrol. Sooty exhaust. Down-market image.

MY WORST CAR: AINSLEY HARRIOT'S BMW 518

Somehow I expected a lot more from a BMW, but then, this one was hardly brand new. It also had left-hand drive, so maybe I was asking for trouble. I know the 518 wasn't the best BMW ever built, but this Y-registered one only seemed to run for a day or so before needing a repair. Luckily—or unluckily—I had a mechanic friend in Brixton who said he knew all about BMWs and could sort it out. The thing was though, every little job seemed to cost at least £70. I'd look through the bill and it was things like a washer at £5 which humped the cost up. I calculated that within six months I'd spent more than the purchase price of the car purely on repairs.

By far the most embarrassing incident involved me and a girlfriend starting to get amorous—the driver's seat broke, which ended any further developments. For a while, a black plastic bin-liner full of old clothes behind the seat kept it propped up. Of



course, the cost of a brand-new replacement was more than the car was worth, so I ended up getting a second-hand one from a scrap yard.

Which is, now I come to think of it, where I should have left the BMW. My theory is that it must have been involved in a lot of accidents before I

got hold of it. Everything rattled, and the engine behaved like an old washing-machine banging about on an uneven floor. The sills leaked in water, fitting a suppressor for a radio only seemed to cause more interference, and at least once a week it refused to start. I kept saying to myself, this is a BMW, so it must be OK. I dearly wanted to be cool, but that was difficult with steam billowing from the bonnet.

That BMW was a pig of a car. I part-exchanged it for a Fiat Mirafiori, and I must be the first driver in history to say they preferred an old Fiat to a BMW. The whole experience has put me off BMWs for life. That's why I drive a Mercedes.

Ainsley Harriot's new book 'Meals in Minutes' (BBC Worldwide, £14.99) accompanies his seven-part series on BBC2. He was speaking to James Ruppert.

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AT HOME: CLOCKS

Time flies when you have to be in three places at once

Here's a hands-on approach to time-keeping.
Rosalind Russell says, with designs in minute detail.

Some people need three clocks to tell the time simultaneously in London, New York and Sydney, either because they are so busy and important, or because they're too lazy to work out the time difference. But then time is money.

Especially to people like Sylvester Stallone, who has a gold-faced clock covering the entire ceiling of the breakfast room of his Miami waterfront home, described by a breathless admirer as "neo-classical". It's certainly different, but hard to

say if it's just what you need in the morning above your Marmite and toast.

Nottingham-based portrait artist Christopher Unwin has been making hand-painted clocks for three years, an artistic sideline that turned into a business. He has a range of designs which include a striped cat in front of a lighthouse, a seagull sitting on the sand, polar bears, and different sailing ships, but he'll accept commissions to paint anything you like, including a picture of your own home.

He has already painted a client's country cottage on one clock. The clock casings are painted in a combination of acrylic and emulsion paints on a wood or metal base and have a cracked distressed finish. The maritime clocks - and free-standing beach-hut clocks - have proved popular with Americans, possibly because

the design reminds them of New England.

One American visiting Nottingham from his US nuclear base in Norfolk saw Christopher's work and commissioned him to paint a ship. Not Polaris, disappointingly, but a particular sailing ship which he supplied a picture of. The buyer was equally particular about the exact shade of background colour. "They do like to match up the clock with the curtains," comments the artist.

Another current commission has come from an actor appearing at the Nottingham Playhouse. His clock will feature figures from the Commedia dell'Arte; harlequin-type figures in ornate costume, which pre-date pantomime, and which require careful research.

Christopher Unwin's clocks start at £54, but commissions are negotiable, depending on the

complexity of design. He displays his clocks on the website www.enmet.co.uk/paintedclocks.

Almost all the leading design shops now feature a range of clocks to match contemporary or quirky furnishings. The Art Room's spring mail order brochure includes the popular floppy clock, inspired by Salvador Dali's melting timepieces.

Made of resin, in bright blue, it's designed to sit on a shelf over four inches deep. It costs £79.95 plus postage.

BHS have introduced a smart floor-standing, battery-operated clock with metal legs and face surround either in natural wood or painted blue, which wouldn't look out of place in a loft-style show home;

£35 through the Home & Lighting catalogue. More retro is Debenhams' mock tortoise-shell clock, either round or square, at £15.

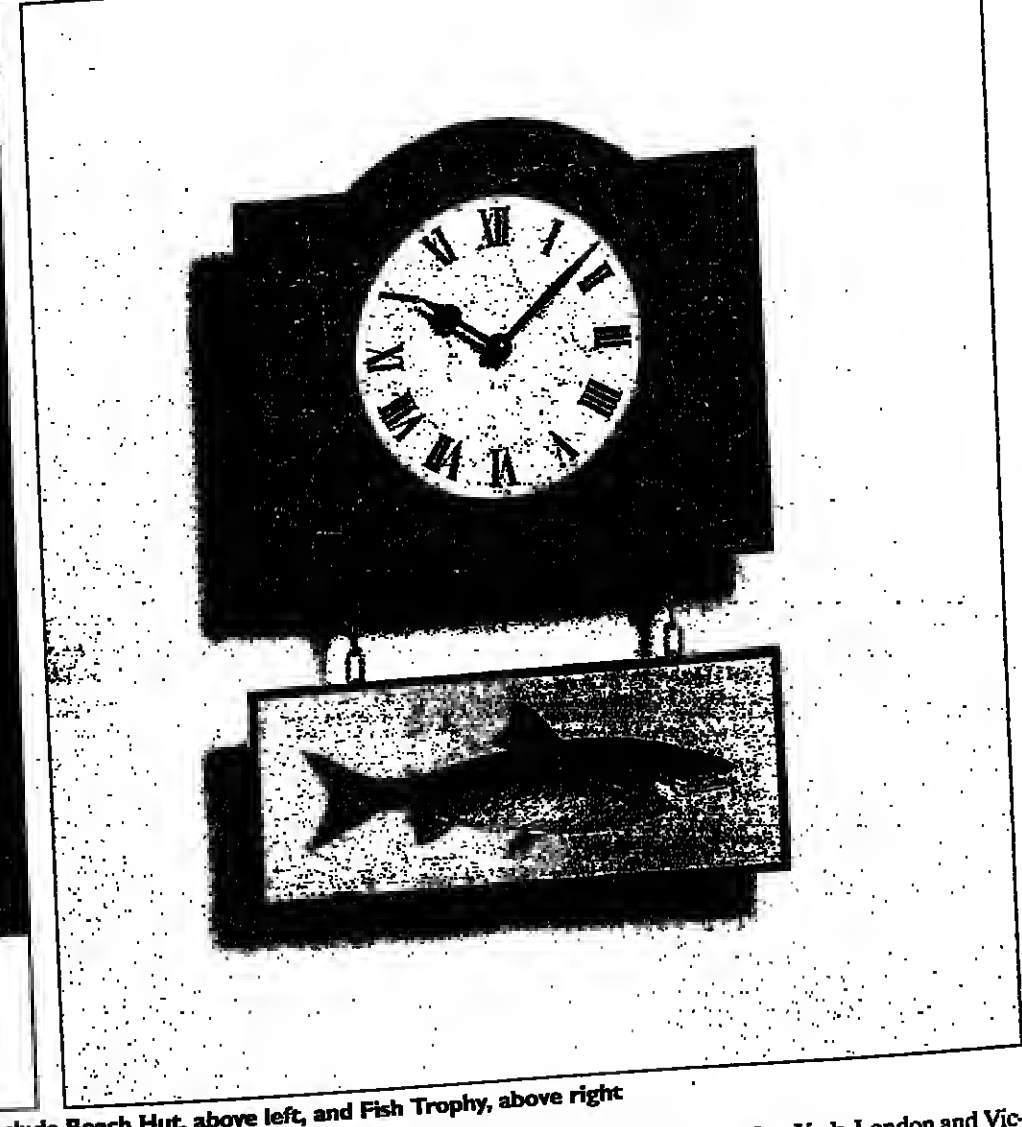
If tempus rarely fugit for you, you can always build your own grandfather clock. Just 35cm when assembled, it's the grandfather of all jigsaw puzzles, with foam-backed pieces, ornate

cabinet paintings, Roman numerals, a working mechanism and a traditional moon crown-piece. It costs £39.95 from the mail order firm Bits & Pieces.

But for those who really do have to know the time in three cities at once, the Maritime Company offers the Bristol Shipping Company clocks, three clocks showing the time

in New York, London and Victoria on a hand-painted wooden background, for £69.50 plus postage.

Christopher Unwin, 0115 9856 389; Art Room, 01993 770444; BHS, 0990 24700; Debenhams, 0171 408 4444; Bits & Pieces, 01379 649 629; The Maritime Company, 01993 770450.



All at sea: Christopher Unwin's hand-painted clocks include Beach Hut, above left, and Fish Trophy, above right

Why can't builders be more like dentists?

Ginetta Vedrickas wonders why it is so difficult to get work done on your home without having a nervous breakdown.

If only builders were more like dentists. Everyone swears that they have the most fantastic dentist but people only swear about their builders. Each time I hire someone I vow not to be fooled by that outwardly charming "renovator" who reads the same newspaper as me and is kind to children and animals. Then as I survey the half-finished "improvements", the mounting quotations and re-live the arguments with someone whose charms have long faded I realise it's ending in tears again.

Are you as glib as when getting a man in dungarees to do what you want?

Anita heard about Harry at a coffee morning. "When I found he advertised through my local NCT newsletter I thought he must be good." Anita wanted to restore her Victorian terrace, which was laid out as two flats, and needed a skilled person for the extensive work ahead.

"When Harry came to give a quote he spotted a 'Coal not Dole' sticker and we got talking about politics. We seemed to share the same ideals. What really impressed me was the contract he produced giving timescales and payment dates."

Anita was also influenced by Harry's attitude to her child. "He made a big effort with Kieran, who adored him in return. Harry promised to ensure the house was



Saintly plumber Stephen Greene, who comes recommended and prefers his customers recommended, too

safe and there wasn't too much dust around. I believed he'd be sensitive to our needs so I gave him the job."

Anita paid regularly, as the contract specified, but found Harry's deadlines slipped. "We even took out a loan to keep up my payments but as the months went by it became clear that he wasn't keeping to his schedule and more jobs were going wrong."

Harry's child-friendly approach disappeared along with his deadlines and Anita and toddler Kieran were left with half-built walls. "The final disaster was the kitchen, which I'd decided to adapt, but I let Harry persuade me to have a new hand-built one." Although Anita paid as much as hating one from John Lewis, the resulting kitchen is fraught with problems. "The extractor fan is in the

wrong place, the sink and cooker don't even fit. It breaks my heart every time I look at it," says Anita.

And the charming Harry? "He became increasingly sarcastic and would sulk if I asked him to put things right. Work was supposed to finish in June but it was November before we could use our kitchen. It ended very badly."

Which? recently carried out a

survey of their members giving them details of over 5,000 tradespeople and 11 different trades. Unsurprisingly the most satisfied customers had used the tradesperson before and in contrast to Anita's experience the next most satisfied group employed someone recommended to them. Some trades did better than others but general builders and gas fitters came out worst. Which? has produced a fact-

sheet giving tips on how to choose a tradesperson and get jobs done properly. The survey found that trades associations can't guarantee the work standards of their members or offer protection if things go wrong.

Wendy thought her choice of builder was perfect. How could you go wrong employing a friend's husband? With limited funds and a Victorian terrace to renovate, Wendy outlined her priorities and the builder quoted a price - £15,000. Work began but Wendy found that nothing was properly finished and the friend's husband kept demanding more money. "It got to the point where I considered I'd paid enough for the jobs I'd originally specified but which still weren't done. I even paid an extra £10,000, which he claimed wasn't enough," says Wendy.

The erstwhile friendly husband turned nasty. "We had a massive argument and he threatened me with violence. It was horrible. After that I dreaded humping into him." Before Wendy could change her locks the builder took revenge by removing lots of things from the house including a set of double doors. Kitchen floor tiles and worktops were also missing. And the friend? "We haven't spoken since," says Wendy.

The Office of Fair Trading received 13,538 complaints about sub-standard home maintenance, repairs and improvements between January and March 1997, the most recently available figures. The OFT wants to see a register of approved traders who are committed to high standards and consumer redress rather than a reliance on codes of practice. A conference scheduled for later this year will discuss the use of a high-profile logo, and independent arbitration if things go wrong.

An insurance policy launched

this week by Home Buyers Legal Protection gives up to £25,000 of legal cover for £50 if you move and discover problems arising from developers, builders, surveyors and even solicitors. In addition to legal cover you have access to a 24-hour helpline for legal advice and emergency repairs.

Stephen Greene shines as an example of a true British tradesperson. He is a brilliant plumber, reliable, and hates tea. Steve over advertises and prefers his customers to come recommended as well. He warns against using plumbers "because they're cheap" and bemoans the fact that "every year 80-year-old granny can set herself up as a gas fitter." He believes regulation is having positive effects. "Get a recommendation by all means, but make sure they are recognised and will give you their Corgi number."

Steve's halo shines brighter in contrast to the cornucopia of craftsmen who have driven me to seek cognitive therapy. There was Thunderclap, who brought Miss Singh, his dog, to run underfoot cable while he rewired. She managed it but the lights dim when you switch on the kettle. Dave, the "skilled renovator" who did nothing himself but employed teams of boys who didn't understand that paint goes on the woodwork parts but not the glass bits. Lastly dear Punch, whose frequent Amsterdam visits were becoming ever costlier, forcing him to make a midnight call the night before laying the patio to double his quote (thanks for the pile of mouldy bricks you left.) Bitter, mo? Boys, this one's for you.

Which? fact-sheet LRBUIL: 0645-123580; OFT's Home Improvements leaflet: 0870-6060321; Home Buyers Legal Protection LTD: 01968-678989.

Is this warranty not worth the paper it's written on?

The NHBC celebrates an anniversary this week; but many homeowners don't feel like celebrating. Penny Jackson examines why the scheme is defective.

Owners of new homes feel they buy peace of mind when it comes with a warranty from the National House-Building Council. Builders' brochures typically claim: "We create homes for people who rightly expect high standards of design and build quality... and we offer the NHBC 10-year warranty." But what does that mean to someone who finds themselves in a home riddled with defects?

As the NHBC celebrates this week the opening of its five millionth home covered by the scheme, so it is engaged in a review of its services after claims last year that it was failing to represent consumers. More

than 1,000 people have sought help from the National Association of New Home Owners set up three years ago to represent dissatisfied buyers.

Buyers who thought the warranty was a guarantee found that not to be the case. The warranty says that a house has been built to certain standards, that in the first two years it is the builder's responsibility to sort out any problems and after that it is only obliged to put right major structural faults. It is in fact an insurance policy. Clearly there is a yawning gap between what buyers expect the warranty to mean and the reality of its cover.

The insurance ombudsman's bureau, which has been dealing with complaints, has emphasised that the NHBC warranty is not a guarantee covering all potential problems. Walter Merricks, the insurance ombudsman, is adamant about the responsibility of the insurer. "This is an area with which most people are unfamiliar and insurers must make it clear what a warranty does or doesn't cover."

Given that the small print of the warranty may never have been explained to the

purchaser either by a solicitor or by the developer, the discovery that even major building defects are not the responsibility of the council is not surprising. An NHBC survey found that 30 per cent of solicitors have not been passing on full details to clients and it has now brought out a home-buyers guide which, it says, clearly shows what is covered.

But what particularly disturbs those with unresolved problems is how a flawed building can be passed by an NHBC inspector. Nearly two years ago, Timothy Flood moved into his house in Caerphilly three months later than promised and a week after his building society judged it unfit to live in. "The builder did the minimum to meet their requirements. Even so we moved with a 4ft hole in the front of the house and we have had nothing but misery since. The windows still leak, the bath is cracked, the lino was over replaced and the garage where we stored our furniture leaked so badly that everything was ruined."

Jackie Bennett bought her three-bedroom semi in Nuneaton four years ago and now has the prospect of replacing all the

windows at her own expense. The builder's snagging period has elapsed and the NHBC warranty doesn't cover windows. "They are so badly fitted that the water from the condensation runs down the inside of the window into the frames which are rotting. They have already been replaced once but now the glazing company has gone bust and the developers say it is not their problem. I was even told 'what do you expect for £60,000?' What upsets me is that it was never right from the beginning. Some plumbing was also faulty and a leak caused so much damage that if it hadn't been for the lino my washing machine would have fallen through the floor. How could that have met NHBC standards?"

"They are not alone in suspecting a reluctance of the Council to put pressure on dilatory builders even within the first two years when they have a clear obligation. Chris Lorentzen, who founded the Association of New Home Owners and has dealt with thousands of disgruntled owners, believes what is needed is an impartial and accountable body. "The NHBC is funded by the construction industry,"

The Council's role as both regulatory and warranty body is seen by some as far from ideal. Gary Sinclair, a consulting structural engineer, says he has seen builders hide behind the NHBC screen if something is queried. "Supervision of detail is a problem because they think they have blanket cover and it tempts them to cut corners. Defective work becomes hidden until eventually it emerges as an insurance claim." Other professionals who work on sites talk of rarely seeing inspectors. They say some inspectors simply accept the word of the site manager that work has been done properly and that if something needs doing will tick it as a job done and take it on trust that the builder will do it.

However, the NHBC says it inspects every new home it registers for warranty purposes on average seven times and where it provides building control services this increases to 11. There are, though, no statutory requirements for site visits. A spokesman for the council says that inspectors make spot checks and all defects should be logged. Warranties are withheld.

In April the NHBC says it is bringing in a site manager's accreditation scheme, externally validated, reviewable and based on performance.

Some 1.7 million homes are covered by the warranty and last year, of the 24,000 inquiries made, half received site visits. One third were found valid, another third invalid and a third valid under conciliation procedures. But Stephen Hawksworth knows how badly things can go wrong. Nearly 10 years after moving into his new house in Gloucester it is unsaleable since it could require as much as £60,000 spending on it. After his builder refused to do any more repairs, he says the NHBC encouraged him to go to conciliation rather than take legal action. Now after two unsatisfactory conciliation hearings, he is pinning his hopes on an independent assessor.

An NHBC spokesman says it is familiar with the case. "It is extremely complicated." The matter has been brought to the attention of Nick Raynsford, the construction minister. Perhaps not quite the sort of interest the NHBC has in mind during its five millionth celebrations.

11/PROPERTY



On the waterfront: the old gasworks site in Greenwich will give rise to more than a thousand new homes with the emphasis on keeping a human scale. Artist's impression from PA.

Looking forward to the Millennium with a new way of living

The Millennium will bring not just that Dome, but also new housing that aims to be socially and environmentally aware. Andrew Mylius explains.

The contents of the Millennium Dome remain a mystery to all but Peter Mandelson and a few of his close advisers. But Londoners who like the idea of having the Dome for a neighbour could be moving into the new homes months before the Dome itself opens for business.

Millennium Village, a model housing project of 1,377 dwellings, will rise on the site of an old gasworks just south of the Millennium Dome. Anyone who wants to see what brown-field development, architectural sustainability, organic architecture, "intelligent" building, holistic design or social responsibility looks like, should

watch closely: construction starts in October and the first homes should be ready for occupation by the middle of next year.

The scheme has been master-planned by veteran architect Ralph Erskine, best known in this country for the innovative and socially sensitive Byker housing estate in Newcastle and the Ark, an environmentally sophisticated office beside the M4 in Hammersmith, London. He is being supported by acting architects Hunt Thompson, the Moat and Ujima housing associations, and the construction/developer groups are Countryside Properties and Taylor Woodrow. Tom Barker, consultant on product development for the scheme who is managing director of engineers DCAh, says: "There's a satellite of experts buzzing around Erskine".

At first sight there is a striking resemblance to that most English of urban phenomena, the garden-city, born 100 years ago. The completed Millennium Village will contain 20 hectares of park, gardens and allotments. Housing is clustered into sub-communities; traffic will be minimal thanks to

carefully planned public transport; the scale is intimate.

Yet the new village should not suffer from Hampstead Garden Suburb's ghostliness: Erskine has designed it to create "critical density": enough people should live there to stimulate local businesses and support a whole range of shops, restaurants, cafes and studios. A quarter of the housing will be low-cost, assigned for local people, integrated with and indistinguishable from private housing - no snobbery here! And Millennium Village will have a school, health centre and community services centre. Alan Cheny, chairman of Countryside Properties, says the scheme is about transplanting a piece of central London east of the city, "creating a new urbanism with a soft heart".

Buildings have a maximum height of 12 storeys to ensure their inhabitants stay in contact with the ground, even where the scheme is most dense. Green space offers opportunities for recreation and, according to engineer Chris McCarthy of Battle McCarthy, advising on environmental issues, the scheme promises to underpin

the advantages afforded by the mix of urban qualities with "humanising" factors by offering high levels of security. Public areas will be monitored by CCTV, and the tight grouping of houses will encourage neighbourhood-watch schemes. Forget about embattled tower-blocks or lonely suburbs; this is intended to be experimental housing where you know the person next door.

Next to social amenity, environmental issues are important, including the rehabilitation of a heavily contaminated site, ground-breaking standards of energy efficiency and longevity. Peter Sharratt, architect with DCAh, says: "Our aim is to design out problems before they get built. At worst, architects and designers use environmental consultants or ecologists to solve problems with expensive technology that should not have been there in the first place."

Rainwater is prevented from leaching into the sub-soil through the use of non-porous piles. Materials are being chosen according to their embodied energy values - that consumed in producing them -

and use values. They must also be recycled or renewable (the performance of wood is hard to beat at one level; at another, a composite material developed by the Atomic Energy Agency shows promise for flooring and roofing).

The buildings themselves will be modular, allowing for buildings of different sizes and shapes to be produced, and for changes of use - as families grow, or as people set up home businesses, for instance. Tom Barker says: "You don't build the house on site using bricks; you build the pieces in a factory like a car or computer". Assembly will take about three weeks once the site has been prepared, and will enable local people to be involved in construction (and later, modification), without needing special skills.

Perhaps most impressive of all are the energy savings that the architecture will offer. About 50 per cent of all energy consumed in the UK and Europe goes into heating, cooling and lighting buildings. Through improvements in insulation, use of alternative energy, and use of materials in construction, Millennium Village aims to cut

energy consumption by half across the life of a building; the new houses will offer a 30 per cent reduction in water consumption. To help residents control their living environments, each house will be linked to a local area IT network. If you've gone on holiday and forgotten to turn the boiler off, just make a telephone call.

The area network will, in the longer term, enable anyone to plug into the Net or turn the spare bedroom into an office. In the short term, residents will be able to gather local information on bus times, events, shop openings or the weather, simply using a television set.

Millennium Village will go to planning in six weeks. In that time a lot of details will become clearer. But it is already evident that this is a forward-looking project that has the potential to change the way we think about the places we live. As Bernard Hunt of Hunt Thompson says: "We're leaving behind the pessimistic idea that the best is in the past - that we're at the end of history. We are seeking to do better than ever before, and we're living in an age when it's achievable."



PENNY JACKSON

How to take off as a chartered surveyor

If chartered surveyors feel they need a more glamorous image, then Richard Allen is a Public Relations dream with a licence to fly. For the past four years the chartered surveyor and fellow of the RICS has been building his own plane. Now D-Day has arrived and it is about to start its trials. If all goes well, he will be zipping over the Channel for a quick survey of a French property in his single-engine plane with RICS emblazoned on the side, and back in time for tea.

"I started on it during the property recession and it has taken about 4,000 construction hours. As surveying work started to come back I got used to dealing with clients on the phone while up to the armpits in epoxy resin." He enthuses about the low-wing tail-dragger with its full-colour moving maps and cockpit panel of his own design. "The beauty of it is I can keep it in a garage, fill it up and take off anywhere. A local farmer near Epsom is going to let me use his field. I will have a range of about 600 nautical miles - almost the south of France. It is about time surveyors ventured across the Channel. We've been far too insular." Once he has cleared French customs there is no field too far. "Only trouble is the plane is a little tricky to land, but I'm going to be trained by a Red Arrows pilot."

Allen made the plane with the help of his 500 and friends and support from over the garden fence. "It's tail-poked out the end of the workshop, so it caused some comment." But not as

much as it's about to do, if the flying property doc gets off the ground.

It has been proving a Herculean task for estate agents to persuade people to put their homes on the market at the same time as they start house-hunting. One manager of a Black Horse agency even drew up an informal list of potential sellers recently so that there would be for sale if only they were all brave enough to take the plunge. But it seems from their latest Home Report as though sellers are gradually becoming more confident of finding something to buy and are increasingly prepared to see their own places marketed immediately. This is also the finding of the National Association of Estate Agents, whose president, Andrew Jeffery, sees the Catch 22 situation resolving itself as more property comes on to the market.

According to Black Horse Agencies, the time it is taking for sales to be completed has speeded up to an average of 11 weeks, the fastest they have seen since the reports began in 1995. One home in 10 sells in a week or less and nearly half in six weeks or less. On average, homes are achieving 95 per cent of the asking price, a figure which has levelled out over the past year. The hot-spots are led by Alton in Hampshire - it has been at the top for the past three surveys - with an average selling time of two weeks, followed by Gorleston, Great Yarmouth and Jesmond, Newcastle - newcomers to the hot list - with three weeks.

Save the legwork when buying your property - dial a solicitor

You can pay over £500 for a shabby conveyancing service. Or you can pay under £250 for a direct-dial solicitor, and receive a first-rate telephone service. Robert Liebman listens in.

Some first-time buyers are braver than others. When Liz Sowden was negotiating to buy her flat in St Margaret's, on the Thames opposite Richmond, she entrusted the conveyance to a solicitor whom she dealt with exclusively by phone and post. "My friend had used Cunningham's and recommended them so I rang for their brochure," says Ms Sowden, who is personal assistant to the managing director of shirtmakers Thomas Pink.

Ms Sowden was confident that the entire procedure could be handled by a combination of phone and fax, and that is indeed how it turned out, even including minor hitches. Of Cunningham's seven offices, three are in Essex, and none are remotely near central London, where she works, or west London, where she was then living in rented accommodation. Visiting their offices

would have been extremely inconvenient.

"There were problems along the way, but they were sorted out. There were some grey areas in the lease, and my solicitor asked them for clarification. He was diligent in getting his letters satisfactorily answered. Another question involved maintenance and service charges. My solicitor chased them hard to make sure they were fully paid up."

"Some of my friends bought flats and got hiks for things that surprised them. My solicitor brought up these issues himself and sent copies to me of his correspondence. He organised a reserve fund from the previous owner so I did not get stuck for the proportion of the service charge that the seller was responsible for." Her total legal bill was £195 plus an additional £29 for phone, fax, postage, photocopying and petty expenses. VAT had to be paid, and she was also responsible for stamp duty and the other disbursements applicable to all property transfers.

For others who might be similarly tempted, she has only one tentative warning. "In my case, there were no negatives. But if there is a drawback to this method, it's that the procedure is only as good as your solicitor. If I had been unhappy, driving all the way to Essex to discuss it would not have been pleasant."

Not all of Cunningham's conveyancing clients come away with rock-bottom legal costs. "We always give the client an estimate in writing and we like to see the documents first," says

Cunningham's solicitor Stephen Kew. "If someone is subleasing part of a building, for example, a basement flat, the sublease can have two superior leases, and there could be 300 pages of documentation." Cunningham's charges £70 per hour for additional legal work.

Copying letters to their clients is one way that Cunningham's conspires to keep costs down. "Informing clients keeps them happy. It is also cost-effective for us. They don't

'If there is a drawback to this method, it's that the procedure is only as good as your solicitor'

ring up. They know what is going on. They also see from the preliminary correspondence the kind of questions we are asking." Aware of outstanding questions, clients can then speak to the sellers themselves, which helps smooth out and speed the procedure.

Mr Kew says that his firm advises its clients to get a full structural survey, even for brand new properties. "One of our clients did this with a house under construction and they discovered subsidence. They backed away from the purchase. The client lost only the local search fee and partial legal fees."

Like all solicitors, direct-dial solicitors are members of the Law Society and, as such, are insured for claims against them. They can also carry out other legal work often connected to buying property, such as making a will. Electronic mail capability is coming soon to Cunningham's, "but we prefer fax. For legal documents, it's nice to get a signature," says Mr Kew.

The Law Society pamphlet "Working with your solicitor," while not specifically limited to conveyancing, contains much helpful information. The legal and linguistic intricacies of contracts and leases can not be easily summarised, but some books, such as the *Which? Guide to Buying a Flat*, admirably explain the basic terminology and principles.

As distance is no object to direct-dial conveyancing, several of them advertise in *Yellow Pages* throughout the country. The directory will be local to the reader if not to the solicitors themselves.

Cunningham's head office, Brain-tree, Essex, 01376 326863, Croydon, Surrey, 0181 688 8446, Solihull, West Midlands 0121 705 6868. Royal Institution for Chartered Surveyors, 12 Great George Street, Parliament Square, London SW1P 3AD, 0171 222 7000. Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1SX, 0171 242 1222. LEAS - Leasehold Enfranchisement Advisory Service, 8 Maddux Street, London W1R 9PN, 0171 493 3116.

Having your own road may appeal, but it may also be a big headache, says Fiona Brandhorst

'Private, keep out' may be good advice

Living in a house on a private road has a certain snob appeal for some people, but it is not always an unmitigated blessing. In fact there are two types of private road. A private street is a privately maintained road to which the public has a right of way. If it falls into disrepair, the local authority has the right under the Highways Act to make it safe and charge residents for the work. And then there's a private road with no public right of way, that must be gated to through traffic once a year to keep its private status.

Private roads are "perceived to have a better cachet," says Nick Thomas, associate director of Hamptons International in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. The nearby Loudwater Private Estate has a number of entries and exits, all gated except the main one. Only the residents have keys. "Private estates tend to be in good areas and you can attribute a premium to a house in a private road setting," says Mr Thomas.

Malcolm Daniel agrees. He lives on the Firs Estate, four private roads of late Twenties properties designated as a conservation area in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire. "It's definitely contributed to the value of our properties," says Mr Daniel. The recent addition of white gate posts with "private" signs on the three entrances to the estate and road humps, paid for by the residents, have also made their mark.

Four years ago when the roads on the estate had really begun to deteriorate, Mr Daniel took over as vice chairman and treasurer of the Firs Estate

Residents Association. The crunch came when its funds were too low to pay the annual insurance premium providing cover for up to £500,000 if someone claims for an injury caused by the condition of the road (cover is provided by the local authority on public roads).

Now, almost all of the residents from the 85 houses pay an annual subscription of £60 a year and a five-year repair plan is in place. It is assumed that each resident owns half of the road in front of their property. "We can't force people to pay," says Mr Daniel, "but as the profile of residents has become much younger they are able to afford it and actually expect to pay something towards the upkeep."

Last year, the committee appointed a contractor to resurface two of the roads. "It was all very new to us," says Mr Daniel, whose day job is as a film editor with the BBC. "We asked a road surveyor, recommended by the local council, to draw us a map of the areas he considered would need immediate attention. If anyone complains that a pothole outside their house isn't being attended to, at least we can show them the surveyor's report."

Would it not be easier to ask the local authority to take over the estate, since it is a through route? "We looked into it," says Mr Daniel, "but they declined. They wanted to make proper footpaths and kerb edging and we don't want all that."

The Land Registry office in London underlines the importance of asking a solicitor to look very carefully at a property's title deeds to ensure that po-

tential purchasers are happy with rights of access and maintenance obligations. Some private roads may have covenants that restrict redevelopment.

The Firs Estate association is there to maintain the roads, not, Mr Daniel stresses, to sort out neighbourly problems. But for Andre Montaut, director of Almond Construction, sorting out a long-running dispute with a neighbour was vital when he was negotiating to buy a piece of land for redevelopment.

'Private roads have a better cachet. You can attribute a premium to a house there'

The only access was via its own private unsurfaced road. "The chap living next door to the proposed site had had a dispute with the owner over boundaries," says Mr Montaut. Sensing there was money to be made, the neighbour claimed that part of the road and the hedge running alongside it was his property. To avoid a lengthy and costly court battle, for which Almond Construction believed there were no grounds, they suggested the planting of six semi-mature trees as a screen between the development of three detached houses and the disgruntled

neighbour. Eventually, he dropped his claim to the land.

"At least the owners of the new properties won't have any problems over boundaries now," adds Mr Montaut. "And their responsibilities for the private road have been clearly set out within the deeds of their property and were accepted by each of their solicitors." When the site is completed, Almond Construction will hand over the road to its residents.

Russell Copp now knows how important it is to look closely at the deeds when buying a house on a private road. When he bought one of 11 former farmworkers' cottages in Thurrock, Essex, he was pleased with the novelty of living on a private road, even though it was more like a "dirt track". "I thought we'd eventually get together with some of the neighbours and put down chippings to upgrade it," he says.

However, the road was still owned by the builder who had converted the cottages and he had other ideas. Last year, he asked each of the residents for £200 to surface the road. "We had no say in who he chose to do the work," remonstrates Mr Copp. "They were a bunch of cowboys and a year on, the surface is breaking up." The contractor also covered up the main stop-cock outside Mr Copp's cottage with tarmac.

Unsurprisingly, he has refused to pay his share. "I'd advise anyone considering buying in a private road to find out exactly what responsibilities you have and to work together with your neighbours. If you're not sure, always get legal advice."

The house that Adrian and Andrea built

Your ideal home may be impossible to find. But design it yourself, and the sky's the limit.

Robert Liebman

explains how to achieve the ultimate DIY house

Whoever you are and whatever your dreams, your ideal home is almost certainly on the large, light, luxurious side. You'll need a swimming-pool, of course, and a tennis court and stables for the horses - but apart from these extravagant extras, your imaginary house itself is more spacious and comfortable than the norm.

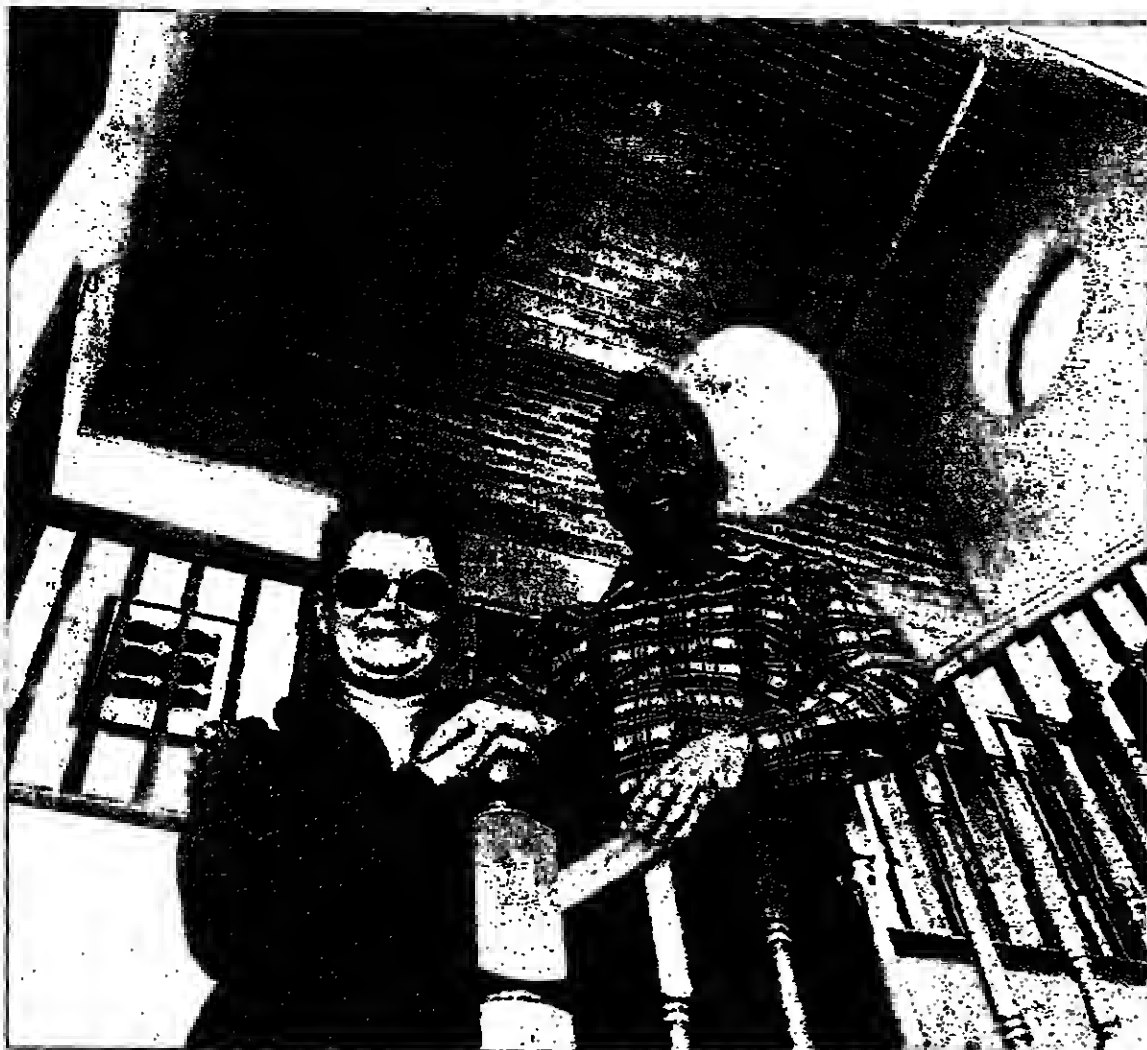
Buying such a home ready-built may be impossible, but by building your own you may get close to the ideal.

Andrea McPherson and Adrian Hirst each owned a house which they had purchased the traditional way. When they set up home together, they decided to sell their respective properties and find a new house. "We looked at old properties to renovate, but they were too costly, both to buy and to update," says Mr Hirst, who works in pharmaceuticals.

Able to finance a self-built home by selling one of their two properties, they started their adventure by confronting the single largest barrier to self-build in Britain: not money, not material, but land. Available, suitable located land on which to build. After an extensive search, they bought a cheap, derelict property from a brewer and knocked it down.

Their new bespoke home had to meet specific requirements. "My son, who is still a student, and my married daughter still needed a family base, and some of our visitors would be wheelchair-users," says Andrea, who is a community worker with the disabled.

Adrian wanted "a workshop for my classic car, and access to peace and quiet. We needed four bedrooms, wide doorways and bathrooms for the disabled, and sound-resistant walls." Factually noting that, as a pianist,



DIY on a grand scale: Andrea and Adrian financed a self-built home by selling a property

Page One

Andrea was still in the learning stage, he says that their interior walls are of sound-absorbing breezeblock, not flimsy plasterboard. Light streams into the hall from a window installed in the roof, and the conservatory can be entered from either the dining-room or the living-room.

"We read the self-build magazines and books, and we attended a self-builders' seminar which had been advertised locally by the Association of Self-Build Architects," Adrian explains. They interviewed several architects and selected Julian Owen, who had given the seminar.

With Mr Owen's help, they then chose a builder. "The architect prepared tender documents which we sent to six different builders, and we hired the one recommended by a friend. Ju-

lian Owen also supplied a self-build pack which helped us to start thinking about design and materials."

They rejected underfloor heating and solar panels as too expensive. "Our architect suggested a slate roof, which would have been three times as expensive as concrete. We decided on concrete. The builder also gave us many options. There were many temptations to exceed the budget."

The end result is more land and more house for less money than typical house owners obtain. "We have a new house that looks like an old one, on a quarter-acre of land. I thought it would be a wrench to leave the old house, but it is a joy to leave the leaks behind, the flat roofs, the cracks, the damp," says Andrea.

Construction itself is a relatively

short, intense interlude in an overall process which, Adrian stresses, requires considerable time, energy and patience. "It took us two years to find the land, and one year to design the house. The actual building was 22 weeks."

Was it worth it? "It was a great deal of effort, but we feel privileged, very lucky," says Andrea. "We would definitely do it again. It was perhaps the most challenging and rewarding experience of a lifetime."

For first-time buyers, financing a self-built home can be tricky. As the house does not yet exist, there is no equity to underwrite a typical mortgage. But the new house will come into existence in stages, and some lenders are prepared to offer phased-in loans which parallel the house-building process. Lenders specialising in self-

build mortgages are listed in the self-build magazines *Build It*, *Selfbuild*, and *Individual Homes: Homebuilding & Renovating*. A fact-sheet brochure available from the Association of Self-Build Architects (ASBA) provides a succinct overview of the major considerations. In greater depth, *The Housebuilder's Bible*, regularly updated by the author, Mark Brinkley, discusses finance and everything else you want or need to know: design, kit homes, project management, inner skin, outer skin, green issues, planning permission, site supervision, materials, and tile weight comparisons. Possible sites are listed by two companies: Plotfinder and Landbank Services provide databases listing available land and renovation sites.

Julian Owen, the architect, says that "architect's fees should be 7-10 per cent for a full hand-holding service, which includes site appraisal, design, construction drawings and site management." He himself is a campaigner to make more brown site land available to private individuals, and admits that "it helps if you have a relative who owns a large garden. Visit all of the estate agents, but also visit local planning offices and speak to utilities, universities, farmers and other landowners. Generate your own good luck."

The cost of the plot of land should be approximately one-third of the total cost. The average self-build budget is approximately £120,000, with £40,000 earmarked for land. Many self-builders do at least some of the work themselves, especially in the garden and external landscaping. Idiot-proof kits - put this nail into this hole: no, not that one, this one - and marvelously designed homes can easily entice those who want to lift more than a pen or a shovel.

The *Individual Homes - Home Building & Renovating Show* is at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, from 19 to 22 March (for details, call *Census Exhibitions*, 0171-287 0770; 01527 836 600).

Julian Owen Associates, Architects, 6 Cumberland Avenue, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 4DH (0115 922 9831). Association of Self-Build Architects (ASBA) (0800 387310). Plotfinder (0891 516526) (50p per minute, approximately three minutes total). Landbank Services (01734 618002).

THREE TO VIEW: AT £250,000



Woodend, a 19th century stone house in the North Yorkshire Moors national park at Rosedale Abbey, stands half a mile down a narrow farm track and has open views across the countryside from almost every window. The four-bedroom house has been restored: internal doors replaced with oak veneer and skirting replaced to match the dado rails. There is a 16ft kitchen with oil-fired Aga, a walk-in pantry, 12ft study, conservatory and 20ft sitting room with stone fireplace. The gardens cover about two thirds of an acre, with a stream running through. GA Town & Country are the agents (01845 522503).



Deep Thatch is a two-storey detached period cottage on Hayling Island, popular with weekend sailors. The three-bedroom, two-bathroom house with large kitchen/breakfast room and dining room, has beamed ceilings, leaded-light windows and open fireplaces. The gardens are secluded and include a walled barbecue area and garage block. There's also a barn, which can provide extra accommodation. The agents are Henry Adams and Partners (01243 533377).



Winterfold, on the edge of a village four miles from Weymouth in Dorset, is a converted former barn. The stone-built four-bedroom house was converted and extended more than 20 years ago and includes a 15ft hall with adjustable bookshelves under the stairs, making it suitable as a study area. On the first floor, there's a 20ft studio/5th bedroom with exposed stone walls, pine vaulted ceiling and a French door opening onto a balcony. There are large gardens, including a workshop with stable door. Agents are Symonds & Sampson (01305 265058).

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